

Horror in Culture & Entertainment

RUE MORQUE

A TRIBUTE TO THE AUTHOR OF
THE HAUNTING OF HILL HOUSE
ON HER 100TH BIRTHDAY

SHIRLEY JACKSON

#170 SEPTEMBER 2018 CAN \$5.99



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16 THE WITCH OF NORTH BENNINGTON

We celebrate 100 years of Shirley Jackson with a pair of experts who take us deep into the work of the author of *The Possession of Miss House*, where unsettling stories expose the dark side of domestic bliss. **PLUS:** Two of the author's books you need to read, and a review of *Shirley Jackson: A Rather Haunted Life*
by APRIL SHELLING

24 THE PAST WON'T STAY BURIED

Nancy Worman uses horror and identity to explore the legacy of the Holocaust in *Demons*, her final film. **PLUS:** A brief history of the cyborg, the possessing entity of Jewish folklore
by SEAN FLUMMER

30 —THE NIGHT— DARK CARNIVAL 2016

HORROR • LITERATURE • ENTERTAINMENT • CAPS

Step right up and marvel at the frightful sights of *Rue Morgue's* new horror and entertainment expo.
by DAVE ALEXANDER and STAFF

34 DRINK WITH THE STYGIAN MASSES

Portland's Lovenshilt Bar spreads its tentacles and serves horror fans made by NATRAN GARRON



DEPARTMENTS

NOTE FROM UNDERGROUND

Notes on DM's latest releases

POST-MORTEM

Upstage the DM's readers and writers

DEADLINES

Notes on the DM's latest happenings

THE COLUMNIST'S REPORT

What's been happening in the DM

NEEDFUL THINGS

Things you need to know about the DM

CONTRIBUTORS

Who's writing the DM's latest issues

THE LATE-NITE ARCHIVE

Notes on the DM's latest releases

THE NIGHT CIRCLE

Notes on the DM's latest releases

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THE NIGHT CIRCLE

Notes on the DM's latest releases

POST MORTEM

COMMENTS • QUESTIONS • CRITICISM



HURDS TO Dave Alexander's Note From Underground in *RMF169* bashing homophobia. I knew you were my true magazine and will always be!

SEAN O'NEILL, VIA FACEBOOK

MY COPY OF *RMF169* came today and my book, *Scored to Death*, is in it! Thank you Aaron Von Lipton for helping to spread the word!

@SCORED2DEATH, VIA TWITTER

LATELY, SOME of Dave's reviews have had me cracking up: "throw the fucking thing away!" is *The Conjuring 2* review from *RMF168*, for example — ha! Also, I've never heard the term "ruth porn" before (Note From Underground, *RMF168*). I suspect I'll start noticing it now that I'm thinking about it. Maybe it's similar to that feeling I get from the films *Boiler Room*, *Menace*, *Street Trash*, etc. In certain movies I at least doesn't mind what the characters are doing, I'm looking around them at the squalor and it gives me the strangest comfort. The writing is always insightful and just hilarious enough. Okay, time to go order *Doctor Butcher M.D.*

CHRISTOPHER REMONSON — ADDRESS WITHHELD

CAST PHOTO from the Rue Morgue presents The Shockleau Tour 2018! Dark Carnival Expo edition!

@WONDERGEEKS, VIA TWITTER



ME-ITM A serious timepiece. I'd never watch *Shriek-o-rama*.

Friend: You're about to see *Microphone Massacre* (at a *OneMacabre* movie night)

Me: @RueMorgue @cinemacabre

@WHITCHRAFTO, VIA TWITTER

HEM THAT was a great weekend. Amazing time at the Rue Morgue Dark Carnival, and looking forward to the next!

@TYPICALLYMIA, VIA TWITTER

HUGE SHOUT-OUT TO Rue Morgue for Dark Carnival. Amazing weekend and hopefully the beginning of an annual event in Hamilton

@KIDARTZ, VIA TWITTER

MY SON AND I went to Rue Morgue Dark Carnival Expo in Hamilton today and really enjoyed it. My son discovered Midnight Syndicate and loves them.

@SHAMPALMERSTON, VIA TWITTER

ANOTHER FINE ISSUE of Rue Morgue, there was only one thing wrong with *RMF168* the article on *Doctor Butcher, M.D.* was just too short! I remember when this movie hit NYC cinemas in the, oh, summer of 1980? Those freakin' posters were everywhere in Times Square and the surrounding environs. Three to a wall, everywhere they could put one. A friend of mine and I got chased away by a cop trying to pry a piece of plywood off a construction fence to make off with one of the posters! While the movie isn't my favorite Italian flick of the '80s — that would be Fulci's *Zombi* (we also tried to get a poster of that out of a movie lobby and failed) — the poster and advertising campaign is one of the best ever! Thanks for bringing back the memories!

BOB MORGANBESSER — STATEN ISLAND, NEW YORK

AS A LONG-TIME reader, I wish to congratulate you on your wonderful publication. Each month I eagerly await its arrival at my local comic store. What makes Rue Morgue so great? It's not just your excellent coverage of what's new in film (loved your coverage of *The Witch* in *RMF163*, but nice horror touches like *Emilia*, *Carver's Report* and *Headful Things*). Also, as a person who lives true crime and history, I really appreciate the many great features that you include on these subjects. I wish you continued success and much respect.

DWIGHT MARK NEVIN — LANCASTER, PENNSYLVANIA

CORRECTION: On the cover of the print edition of Rue Morgue #169 we misidentified the director of *Alice*, Sweet Alice. *Allied Sole* directed the film. We regret the error.

FIND RUE MORGUE ONLINE

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@RUEMORGUEMAG

EXPIRING MINDS

OR RUE MORGUE'S FACEBOOK PAGE



What's the most disgusting thing you've ever had inside your body?

Stomach worms (drank the water in Honduras as a kid)

CORBETT ANGELIS

A spider crawled into my ear once. I was actually relieved when the doctor said it was a spider, as opposed to a cockroach or some other really disgusting insect.

DAN SPURLOCK

Definitely my ex-husband

BETTYWYNNE RICHARDSON

Ten years ago, someone let me a six-pack of beer to eat a hot-size live catfish! It was disgusting, barfed it back up after drinking my winegaps.

RAY FORDING

Collyer's exploded on a Monday — wasn't removed 'til Wednesday night. Full of ginseng.

PELPE DUNN

Got sick in Mexico and a wife doctor gave me snake juice. It was awful.

MIKE BOWEN

Fisher Thomas

JENI BAISBY

NO POSTING OF REVIEWS OR COMMENTS ON THIS PAGE. IF YOU HAVE A COMMENT OR QUESTION, PLEASE CONTACT US VIA FACEBOOK OR TWITTER. WE WILL RESPOND TO YOU AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. IF YOU HAVE A COMMENT OR QUESTION, PLEASE CONTACT US VIA FACEBOOK OR TWITTER. WE WILL RESPOND TO YOU AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.

POST MORTEM
A JOURNAL OF POST-MORTEM
CULTURE
EDITED BY JEFFREY J. WATSON
CONTACT: JEFFREY@POSTMORTEMMAGAZINE.COM

Deadlines



NEWS HIGHLIGHTS HORROR HAPPENINGS

DANA GOULD BRINGS NEW HORROR-COMEDY SERIES TO IFC

American cable and satellite network IFC, best known for its comedy programming, is tossing its hat into the horror ring. The network has ordered eight episodes of *Stan Against Evil*, a scripted horror-comedy series from comedian/writer Dana Gould. Gould will serve as a producer and writer for the show, which began filming in Atlanta in June and will debut IFC on November 2.

"People know me as a comedian or comedy writer, but I'm as big a horror junkie as they come," says Gould, who enjoyed an *Evil*-inspired start as a writer and co-executive producer on *The Simpsons*. "I was thinking about a horror thing to do, just for fun, and came up with the idea of creating a straight-out horror show—something I would want to watch, like *Alien* or *Dark Shadows* or even *Teen Pinks*. There, to make it funny, drop a character from a completely different kind of show right down into the middle of it."

In other words, Gould wondered, what if you put *Archie* Barker in *The X-Files*?

We went on to put a more personal spin on it: "What if my dad was Buffy the Vampire Slayer?"

The result is Stanley Miller, a cranky, conservative New Hampshire sheriff played by John C. McKinley (IFC's *Dark Matter* and *Scrubs*). An angry outburst of his wife's funeral costs him his job, but he soon finds he has even bigger problems: his New Hampshire hometown was built on the site of a 17th-century mass witch-burning, and something has unleashed a torrent of weepful demons. *Stan* reluctantly teams up with his replacement, Sheriff Evil Barrett (Jared Verney). TV's *It's Not in the Woods*, to take on the monsters that are laying siege to their town.

"*Stan* is based very much on my father," Gould explains. "My father is a real man's man. He loves to hunt, fish and watch sports. He is also incredibly funny and sarcastic. If you hear a particularly funny line coming out of Stan's mouth, it's probably something I heard my dad say."

Gould originally turned the idea into a five-minute



John C. McKinley stars as the gruff life character in Dana Gould's *Stan Against Evil*

short script that he planned to produce for a digital platform. These plans changed, though, when he found himself having lunch with Peter Jussara, Executive Vice President of Programming at IFC.

"It wasn't a showbiz lunch," Gould recalls. "It was just two dudes eating chicken. Out of the blue, Pete says to me, 'You should write a funny *X-Files*.' And I looked at him and said, 'Gee, that's weird. I just did.'"

So Gould turned his "five-minute joke" into a half-hour show, which he developed with IFC's original programming department. The show marks the first foray into the horror genre for the network, which has bombed itself as "the home of offbeat, unexpected comedies." It's not a surprising choice, though, when you consider that IFC's parent company, AMC Networks, has enjoyed much success with the genre, the media giant's roster of horror shows includes *The Walking Dead* on AMC and *The Returned* on SundanceTV.

With its mash-up of beaches, curses and alien trappers, *Stan Against Evil* is perfectly poised to help the comedy-centric network tap into that vein. But it's not all wisecracks and puns—Gould says the show has been greatly informed by his love of classic monster movies, especially in one key way that should endear it to horror fans.

"One way that my love of the classics informed the show was my tyrannical insistence on practical effects," Gould says. "With the exception of some wig replacement here and there, you won't find any CG in the show. It's fake blood, people in rubber suits and air cannons loaded with goo—just as God intended. The entire show came from my love of classic horror. When I was nine years old, my friends and I made a *Super 8mm* 'horror' comedy called *Howling Albany*, and here I am, decades later, basically doing the same thing."

APRIL SWELLINGS



PIONEERING EC COMICS ARTIST JACK DAVIS DIES

Jack Davis, a legendary and beloved cartoonist and caricaturist best known for his seminal work in various EC comics and MAD Magazine, died on Wednesday, July 27 at the age of 91. Fans immediately took to Twitter to mourn his passing.

"RIP Jack Davis, the Maddest of the MAD artists," posted director Joe Dante.

"He was so wonderful... a legend," read Neil Gaiman's tweet.

The *Walking Dead* artist Tony Moore wrote, "He was the consummate professional and gentleman, the cartoonist of the 20th century."

Davis, who began illustrating at the age of twelve, was noted for his exaggerated style of illustration, for which limbs and facial features are oversized — an ideal style for drawing creatures. After illustrating various comic strips and advertisements, he gained notoriety during the 1950s when he began contributing to William Gaines' various horror magazines, including *Tales From the Crypt*, *The Vault of Horror* and *The House of Fear*.

Among Davis' claims to fame while at EC is his reworking of the image of the inimitable Crypt-Keeper, transforming him from editor Al Feldstein's original version into one that depicted an older, crankier man with all the oversized appendages.

Davis also illustrated the baseball-themed story "Foul Play," which was cited in *Seduction of the Innocent*, Dr. Fredric Wertham's book that claimed comics were leading to increased cases of juvenile delinquency. While it may have been seen as controversial, Davis' EC work proved to be immensely influential on the generation of horror artists who would follow in his footsteps.

"Jack drew an incredible horror story for *Tales From the Crypt* #43," comic book artist and long-time Davis fan Kelley Jones (*Scream Thing*, *Deadman*) tells *Rue Morgue*. "The story was titled 'Four Way Split,' about a World War II pilot and his bombardier, who become friends and eventually start a business together until they have a falling out." The tale was part modern,

part gothic and part psychological. And he did one of the best covers I ever saw for that story."

In a 2011 interview with the *Washington Post*, Davis recalled his early years working for EC, stating, "I was about ready to give up, go home to Georgia and be either a forest ranger or a farmer. But I went down to [Spring Street] and Lafayette [in New York City], up in an old rickety elevator and through a glass door to Entertaining Comics, where Al Feldstein and Bill Gaines were putting out horror [comic] books. They looked at my



work and it was horrible, and they gave me a job right away!"

In 1952, Davis joined up with MAD, where he would cement his legend; his work appeared regularly throughout the magazine's first two years, and on its cover on numerous occasions. Throughout the 1960s, along with his MAD work, Davis would expand his palette to include magazine advertisements, movie posters and television animation, where he designed characters for series including the *King Kong Show*, *The Combeards* and the *Jackpot Five*.



Over the past decade, Dark Horse Comics has been reprinting various issues of *Tales From the Crypt* in hardcover compilations, preserving Davis' art for long-time horror fans and introducing him to new ones. In Jones' opinion, that work is as remarkable now as it was back then.

"Jack Davis' art from the '50s could come out now without readers being aware [of its age] and it would be as fresh and exciting, and important as published then," he says. "Because Jack Davis is timeless."

ANDY BURL

LITTLE TERRORS SHORT FILM SERIES EXPANDS TO DVD

After five years of creeping out audiences in Toronto, monthly short film program Little Terrors is going global. Some of the best offerings from the ongoing festival, which is the brainchild of filmmaker Justin McConnell (The Crippled, Skull Market), are being compiled for VOD and a DVD release. Titled *Minutes Past Midnight*, it's the first in an ongoing series of anthologies co-produced by Indecent Entertainment, Uncork'd Entertainment, Raven Banner Entertainment, Unstable Ground and Rue Morgue, and will feature nine short offerings from throughout Little Terror's history.

McConnell is a hands-on programmer who curated the films from submissions and from various festivals from around the world.

"In 2011 I had the idea for a monthly short film festival, and was contacted with a great spot in Toronto called The Projection Booth," McConnell explains of the genesis of Little Terrors. "We launched the first event in July 2011, then eventually moved to Carfax Cinema. As of this date we have played roughly 500 shorts from all over the world, and taken the event on tour through the US, Canada and Mexico. We

actually had a loose idea for these anthology releases even back then, but the distribution and costs didn't work. Now that we have these great partners, we are finally able to move forward with it."

The directors spotlighted in *Minutes Past Midnight* are Robert Boesch (Hemlock), Lee Crane (Ghost Train), Francisco Somo Kim (Awake), Ryan Lightburn (Road Rape), Marc Martinez Jordan (Timothy), Kevin McNeil (The Mill at Calder's End), James Moran (Crazy for You), Christian Rivers (Reeder) and Sid Zamborin (Never Tear Us Apart). Narrowing it down to nine films was a difficult task, says McConnell.

"There is so much quality to these films, and it's great that we are helping them find an audience.... [T]he great thing is that we are doing multiple releases, so we were able to block shorts into themes and plan several releases based on that."

Little Terror's *Minutes Past Midnight* will hit VOD platforms on October 18, with a DVD to follow on February 7, 2017. Plans for the follow-up release are already underway.

"I can't say too much about the second re-



lease," teases McConnell. "But I will say that those who like space and sci-fi with their horror are in for a huge treat."

AMEY BURNS

ENTRAILS

As the cinematic adaptation of Stephen King's *The Dark Tower* topped filming from South Africa to New York City over the summer, more plot details emerged. According to King and director Nikolaj Arkel, the pivotal characters of Eddie and Susan are well



absent from the first film, though should *The Dark Tower*, currently budgeted at \$50 million, be a critical success both will be featured in subsequent re-releases. As well, the film is serving as a sequel to the eight-book series rather than a direct adaptation of one specific book. *The Dark Tower*, starring Idris Elba as Roland Deschain, The Gunslinger, and Matthew McConaughey as The Man in Black, is due in theatres February 17, 2017.

The Last Days will receive a direct sequel in the form of a comic book in releases courtesy of Vertigo, the mature publishing division for DC Comics. The series, set to

debüt in stores and online on October 12, will be written by *Knock* Slash creator Tim Seeley and illustrated by Scott Golicewski and Patricia Malinelli, with covers supplied by Tony Harris. It will pick up shortly after the events of the original 1987 film, and finds the Frog Brothers protecting the character of Star from a new group of vampires.

Sony and director Nikiya Aron Oshiri (*The Girl With the Dragon Tattoo*, 2009) are remaking *Flatliners*, the 1990 film from Joel Schumacher about a group of young doctors experimenting with the afterlife by stepping and then reporting their hearts. The new version will star Ellen Page and Nina Dobrev, alongside Kiefer Sutherland (who starred in the original film with Julia Roberts and Kevin Spacey). He will portray an older doctor at the new iteration. *Flatliners* is currently shooting in Toronto and has no release date.

Minneapolis critic/author Brian Fuller recently gave *Paranormal State* the go that the series could return for a fourth season. In an interview with Collider, Fuller explained that, for logistical reasons, including rights to the characters, any discussions about a new season will have to wait until August 2016, but that stars Wade Miller (Hansel Leader) and Hugh Dancy (Mik Gasham) are interested in returning to their roles. Fuller also revealed that he has future episodes mapped out. NBC cancelled the critically acclaimed but poorly viewed show in 2015.

After the CW Network seemingly put an end to talk of an ongoing *Friday* film (30th television series this past spring, rumors of videocassette sales that there still may be a chance that Jason Voorhees will be stalking teens on TV. Sources are saying that the network is looking for the right story to take the franchise to series and will revisit any hopes in April 2017. Should nothing pin out with CW, streaming services including Netflix and Amazon could then become an option.

AMEY BURNS

MONSTRO BIZARRO

If you're having trouble finding Bigfoot, then you'll want to stop by the Expedition Bigfoot Museum in Cherry Log, Georgia. The museum, which opened earlier this year, is the latest roadside attraction dedicated to the history and growing popularity of the legendary beast. Founded by David and Malinda Bokros, the establishment is a step above your average roadside attraction, offering a 4,000-square-foot facility full of artifacts, life-size displays, listening stations, sighting maps, and even a "Sasquatch Theater." The museum combines the nostalgic feel of an old-time attraction with modern technology to deliver a fun and interactive experience suitable for the entire family. Standout items include alleged footprints, newly donated face buds, and mini recreations of famous Bigfoot encounters and a section dedicated to *The Legend of Boggy Creek*. For more information, visit facebook.com/expeditionbigfoot/.

LYLE BLACKBURN

MORE MONSTRO BIZARRO AT BEE-INDIE.COM



BLOOD TRAP

A group of criminals bite off more than they can chew in this heist-gone-wrong vampire thriller starring Vinnie Jones (Snatch, X-Men - The Last Stand), Costas Mandylor (Saw franchise) and Gianni Capaldi. Available on DVD & Blu-ray (CLD 0380)

STALKER

From Australia comes this twisted tale of love and revenge as a woman catches the man stalking her only to find herself falling in love with him! Starring John Jarrett (Wolf Creek) and Keirin Fairfax (Young Einstein). Available on DVD & Blu-ray (CLD 0428)



ALSO AVAILABLE



LONDON MAY - DEVILUTION: THE EARLY YEARS

Former drummer of Samhain put together this collection of his early days featuring previously unreleased tracks by Samhain, Dog Nasty, Circle Jerks and more! Available on CD and Vinyl (CLD 0236)

CORONER'S REPORT

WEIRD STATS & MORBID FACTS

170

British fashion student Tina Garono is working on a project in which she plans on "harvesting" late designer Alexander McQueen's DNA from a lock of hair included with his 1992 collection in order to grow skin to make a leather jacket.

Luana Platter, who played Andrea on TV's *The Walking Dead*, was signed to an eight-year contract with the show and was originally "supposed to end up with Rick" before the change in showrunners altered narrative plans.

The Boston Children's Hospital displays various objects outside of its Ears, Nose and Throat (ENT) department that kids have swallowed or stuck in facial orifices since 1918, including a chicken bone, a crucifix and a sandwich in a bag.

The "baseball bat" scene in Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining* required 127 takes, earning it a Guinness World Record for the "most takes ever for a scene with spoken dialogue."

This past July, a 19-year-old French woman lost a breast her suicide, in which she layed in front of a car radiator twice.

According to actor Jeffrey Dean Morgan, *The Possession* (2012) set was plagued by strange occurrences, from randomly exploding lights to chilly breezes, culminating in a mysterious stormy facility fire that destroyed the film's props.

Scientists have discovered that the Pacific Beetle Cockroach generates a crystal high in protein, fat and sugar to feed its offspring. They are currently trying to reverse-engineer the "cockroach milk" so it can be produced as mass quantities for human consumption.

Track scenes from Steven Spielberg's *Duel* were later used in a 1978 episode of TV's *The Incredible Hulk* titled "Never Else a Truck as Evil Beast" without the director's permission.

In the 1980s, many people reported being afflicted by "exploding teeth," preceded by unbearable pain. Modern scientists believe the phenomenon was caused by an adverse reaction between hydrogen gas and the metals used in dental fillings.

For decades, David Lynch has refused to divulge how the baby trap in *Blue Velvet* was created, some believe it's an embalmed sheep or calf fetus.

A woman cooked to death this past May after witchdoctors in rural China attempted to "clean the ghosts out of her body" by placing her in a wooden barrel and suspending it over a vat of boiling water.

It was so important to director Norman Taurog that his child star Jackie Cooper authentically cry in the 1951 comedy-drama *Slippy* that he had a crew member take the boy's dog out back and pay him to shoot it.

A crowd line outside of Dominique Ansel Bakery in New York had to be temporarily rerouted this July after the corpse of a man was discovered on a bench along its path.

COMPILED BY NICHOLE E. KIBLER
FOR A WEIRD STAT OR MORBID FACT SEND IT TO: report@ew.com

BODY HORROR

ALLEN QUEEN

ACTRESS: Bryan Black (@bryanblack, @bryanblack)

"I've been driving since I was a kid, and what little kid doesn't love monsters? It's really liberating to take something scary and add a lot of gore to it and just have fun with it. Also, the contrast of something beautiful mixed with something terrifying is always striking. Whether it's black and grey or colour, it's always a treat."

HAVE A GREAT MONDAY! GET STALKED BY NICHOLE E. KIBLER. nichole.kibler@ew.com

THE RIDE MORGUE SICK TOP SIX GRAVE GRABS

1. **THE RETURN OF THE LIVING DEAD**
TRASH DRAGGED DOWN BY THE DEAD
2. **DRAW ME TO HELL**
MRS. GANDY TAKES A TUFT OF CHRISTINE'S HAIR
3. **TALES FROM THE HOOD**
CHUCKED COP GRASPED BY THE GENADS
4. **THE SERPENT AND THE RAINBOW**
FULLMAN PULLED UNDERFOUND
5. **FRIDAY THE 13TH PART 6**
VILE VOYAGEES TEARS AT TOMMY
6. **CARRIE**
SUE'S WRIST GETS WRAPPED

TORTURED TAGLINE

ALIEN CONTAMINATION (1984)

"YOU FEEL THEM
IN YOUR BLOOD!"

FINAL WORDS

"MARY-BETH AND JOHN WERE LEFT
SPEECHLESS AS GREAT UNCLE CRESTER
PRESENTED THEM WITH THE VERY KIDNEY
STONE THAT KILLED THEIR GRANDMOTHER"

THIS MARCH IS CAPTAIN CORBETT MARCH 15
DON MACLEAN

Drop by our Facebook page every month for a chance to have your Final Words



BITE

THIS MIGHT STING A LITTLE



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- AIN'T IT COOL NEWS



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AVAILABLE FOR A LIMITED TIME AT RUE-MORQUE.COM

1 BIGFOOT/YETI/SASQUATCH TRINITY

\$7 each, or 3 for \$18

Make your cryptozoic hunter status official by slapping one of these on your knicks. Choose from Bigfoot Patrol, Yeti Squad or Sasquatch Brigade (or get all three!)—each measuring 8" by 2.75" wide with a protective plastic backing for extra durability. The world needs to know: you're here to hunt monsters.



2 CEREAL KILLER CEREAL BOWL

\$22

When you're ready to murder a box of Corn Pops, reach for a Cereal Killer bowl. Featuring red blood splatters and black lettering, each bowl has a one-of-a-kind, hand-painted splatter pattern and is top-rack dishwasher safe. Skarpen yer spoon.



3 HORROR GREETING CARDS THREE-PACK BY SEAS AND PEAS

\$12

Roses are dead, violets are too... Send these dear to your kooky cosmic cards with original illustrations riffing on Psycho and The Shining, plus that old standby, the zombie. Printed on recycled cardstock and packaged with red envelopes, these 4.25" by 5.5" greeting cards avoid your sickest stamps.



4 NEVER SLEEP ALONE ZOMBIE BEDDING BY MELISSA CHRISTIE

\$112.99

Your sheets will always see action with Melissa Christie's Never Sleep Alone zombie bedding. Includes one queen duvet cover (90"x86") and two pillowcases (20"x30") adorned with the undead. Printed on 100 percent cotton, using eco-friendly water soluble inks, they're available in white, the best color for bedtime blood and gore.



All prices in USD unless otherwise indicated.
Items available at Rue-Morque.com until
September 17, 2015 only.

CRYPTIC COLLECTIBLES

CHILD'S PLAY 2 CHUCKY PROWD PLUSH DOLL

(Steven Spielberg/Amblin Entertainment, Inc., 1990)

Released in 1990 to coincide with *Child's Play 2* hitting theaters, this 6 1/2-inch-tall plush Chucky doll has a plastic head with robed hair, trademark denim overalls, striped shirt and a fabric version of the character's red-and-white sneakers.

The company also released alternate 6- and 12-inch dolls with suction cups attached to the hands and shoes. At press time, there were no listings for this hard-to-find doll on eBay.

JAMES BURNELL

MONI CRYPTIC COLLECTIBLES AT RUE-MORQUE.COM



HARDCORE INDIE HORROR



THE NEON DEAD

A Grin From Fear to Fear.



THE PURGING HOUR

Lock your doors.
Don't let them in.



A HOUSE IS NOT A HOME

No one gets out of this house alive or DEAD!



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WE CELEBRATE 100 YEARS OF SHIRLEY JACKSON WITH A PANEL OF EXPERTS WHO TAKE US DEEP INTO THE WORK OF THE AUTHOR OF **THE HAUNTING OF HILL HOUSE**, WHERE UNSETTLING STORIES EXPOSE THE DARK SIDE OF DOMESTIC BLISS

THE WITCH OF NORTH BENNINGTON

by April Snellings

THE LATE 1940s ARE OFTEN CONSIDERED TO BE SOMETHING OF A PREGNANT PAUSE IN THE HORROR GENRE. Val Lewton, the decade's most reliable producer of quality horror films, made his last genre title in 1946, and the '50s-defining atomic-monster subgenre wouldn't get underway in earnest until Godzilla emerged from the Pacific in 1954. Ray Bradbury's 1947 horror collection *Dark Carnival* was barely a blip on the radar; Lovecraft was ten years dead by then, and the pulp industry was in sharp decline.

So perhaps it's not surprising that the decade's most shocking piece of fiction appeared not behind a Weird Tales cover, but in the esteemed pages of *The New Yorker*. The story's title, "The Lottery," was unassuming enough, and so was its author, Shirley Jackson, a 31-year-old mother and wife who'd just published her first novel.

For the bulk of the story, there's nothing to indicate that Jackson would one day be hailed by the likes of Stephen King and Guillermo del Toro as a master of psychological horror. The inhabitants of a pastoral community gather to draw lots in an annual contest, but only in the final sentences is the awful truth revealed: the "winner" of the lottery is ritually stoned to death to ensure the town's prosperity for the coming year.

Jackson's story prompted more mail than any piece of fiction published by the magazine before or since. Hundreds of letters poured in from readers who were confused, shocked or angry. Some wanted to know if such rituals were actually taking place in America, and where they could go to watch one.

Its creator was even more of a curiosity: an author whose bio described her as "the only contemporary writer who is a practicing amateur witch, specializing in small-scale black magic and fortune-telling with a Tarot deck."

Shirley Hurdie Jackson was born in San Francisco, California, on December 14, 1916. She spent most of her childhood in an affluent suburb called Burlingame, and in spite of a prickly relationship with her mother, Jackson seemed happy enough until the family moved to Rochester, New York, when she was sixteen.

Already an introvert who preferred to spend her time writing in her bedroom, Jackson had trouble fitting in and struggled with her self-image — problems ex-



acerbated by her mother's lifelong attempt to mould Jackson into the kind of pious and proper daughter that the large-framed, wild-haired and intensely imaginative girl didn't want to be.

Jackson married future literary critic Stanley

Edgar Hyman in 1940, and the couple would eventually settle in the tiny Vermont town of North Bennington. Jackson split her time between waking and raising four children — and, if rumours are to be believed, studying the dark arts.

Much of Jackson's alleged witchcraft involved more of a winking eye than an evil one. Whether she was actually a practicing witch is still a matter of debate, but she was a serious and voracious student of the history of magic and the persecution of women thought to command it. She amassed a huge collection of books on the subject, not to mention an array of amulets, charms and black cats. The image stuck, one reviewer jokingly commented that Jackson wrote "not" with a pen but a broomstick. She was jokingly said to have used black magic to break the leg of publisher Alfred Knopf when he displeased her. Another story has Jackson, a devoted Dodgers fan, attempting to hit the Yankees during the 1948 World Series. (It didn't work.) She even authored a non-fiction children's book called *The Witchcraft of Belaire Village*, published in 1956 — the year before the names of the accused witches were finally and officially cleared. Magical abilities aside, Jackson would go on to cultivate an unusual career.

She was a popular writer of humorous stories of domestic life that earned her high pay in

women's magazines — and of dark tales of gothic horror and psychological suspense.

It was her 1969 novel *The Haunting of Hill House* that would cement her reputation as an American horror legend. Jackson's best-known novel centres on Eleanor Vance, a desperately lonely young woman set adrift by the death of her overbearing mother. Eleanor agrees to participate in a ghost-hunting experiment in a foreboding manor, only to find that, once she's there, the house isn't inclined to let her go.

Hill House was a critical and commercial success. Hollywood shelved out \$27,500 for the rights — an amount equal to around \$660,000 today. David Robert Weiss consulted the author throughout development, it was Jackson who suggested the shortened title, and she expressed approval when Wise and scriptwriter Nelson Gidding told her they saw the house as something more akin to a mental institution than a haunted mansion. That wasn't what she'd intended, Jackson told them, but it was a fine idea.

Jackson made it to New York for the premiere of *The Haunting* in September of 1965, but only barely. The author who had written so masterfully of a woman trapped in a haunted house had become bound to her owl, rather than ghosts, her pillars were debilitating catitis and acute arthralgia. She would finish only one more novel: the extraordinary 1982 gothic response poem *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*.

Jackson died in her sleep on August 8, 1965 at her Vermont home. Like American horror masters Poe and Lovecraft before her, she did not live to see her 49th birthday.

But Jackson did something Poe and Lovecraft hadn't: she wrote about the horrors faced by women in a society that allowed them limited control over their own lives (see p.78 for a look at five essential Jackson tales). Certainly there are some pre-Jackson masterpieces that deal with these issues — Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1892) comes to mind, and there was an entire tradition of gothic literature that addressed the dark side of domesticity — but she was the first canonical American horror author to write female characters who reflected the problems faced by so many of her readers.

To commemorate Jackson's 100th birthday, *Rue Morgue* has assembled a panel of experts to help us conjure a better picture of her life and legacy: writer and editor Sarah Weinman, whose work has been a driving force in the rediscovery of female-authored mid-century suspense fiction, noted book critic and biographer Ruth Franklin, author of *Shirley Jackson: A Rather Haunted Life*, supernatural fiction expert Melinda R. Anderson, co-editor of *Shirley Jackson: Influences and Continuities*, and Bram Stoker Award-winning novelist Sarah Langan, author *The Missing and Audrey's Door*. Together, they reveal the unlikely author behind some of the most important horror stories in the American literary canon.



Black Magic: Woman Shirley Jackson at home, in Vermont with her children

IF YOU ONLY KNOW SHIRLEY JACKSON'S WORK BY THE 1963 MOVIE ADAPTATION *THE HAUNTING*, YOU NEED TO READ THESE FIVE BOOKS

BEYOND HILLHOUSE

by April Snellings

SHIRLEY JACKSON'S *THE LOTTERY* AND *THE BIRD'S NEST* ARE THE MOST WELL-KNOWN OF HER SHORT STORIES. JACKSON is all of horror literature, besides cementing its author's reputation as the grande dame of American dark fiction and providing the source material for one of the greatest ghost movies ever produced (1963's *The Haunting*), it all but invented our modern concept of the haunted house narrative.

But Jackson's body of published work, which includes six novels, four children's books, two screenplays and dozens of short stories, is peppered with magazine standards. Whether you're a devoted fan or a Jackson neophyte, here are five volumes that should haunt your bookshelves.

THE LOTTERY AND OTHER STORIES (1949)



Almost two decades before David Fincher wrote the novel that would eventually be adapted as *The Usual Suspects*, Jackson penned one of the most unsettling folk-horror tales ever produced: "The Lottery," about a bucolic American town that comes together once a year for a grisly stoning ritual.

lends its name to this collection, which also gathers 24 of Jackson's other stories. Some of them are humorous, but the author's trademark sense of menace is never far from the surface. Highlights include "The Tooth," in which a routine dental procedure leads to madness, and "The Watch," about a young boy who encounters a sinister figure on a train.

THE BIRD'S NEST (1944)

Sensational cover copy lauded *The Bird's Nest* as "a strange struggle for sanity that made living a nightmare," but Jackson's third novel is a nuanced and intricately unsettling portrait of mental illness. The



story centres on Elizabeth Richmond, a frail young woman whose life is spent when she begins to receive threatening notes of work and her aunt accuses her of sinking out for late-night trysts she doesn't remember having. At first her psychotic suspects demonic possession, but he soon realizes that Elizabeth's identity has splintered into four distinct personalities. Obvious lines were drawn between *The Bird's Nest* and *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, but Jackson's novel is better read as the harbinger of dissociative-personality narratives such as *The Three Faces of Eve* (1957) and *Sybil* (1973), then a direct descendant of Robert Louis Stevenson's iconic tale.

THE SUNDIAL CYCLE (1955)



This one's Jackson's stellar novel about unpleasant entities lurking in the periphery and passageways of a gothic manor. *The Sundial* concerns the Helmsen clan, a family of over-privileged and ridiculously petty backstabbers who hole up in a gothic mansion to ride out the apocalypse. Like much of Jackson's work, her fourth novel is heavy on ambiguity — the clan's power-hungry matriarch might have murdered her adult son and ghostly visions might portend global destruction, but those elements could also be chalked up to paranoia and cult brainwashing. Even the final, chilling passages are open to interpretation. The *Sundial* generated comparisons to Edgar Allan Poe and Nathaniel Hawthorne, but it is entirely a Jackson original. It's a wickedly funny gothic nightmare that leaves readers wondering which idea is

more horrifying: that the apocalypse is nigh, or that the failure of humanity rests in the hands of the Helmsen tribe.

WE HAVE ALWAYS LIVED IN THE CASTLE (1959)



While it hasn't entered the cultural consciousness to the extent of "The Lottery" or *Hill House*, Jackson's last completed novel is considered by many to be her finest work. Castle tells the story of Merricat and Constance Blackwood, a pair of sisters who, along with an invalid uncle, have secluded themselves in their family's crumbling estate after the rest of the Blackwoods succumbed to arsenic poisoning. (One of the sisters, of course, is the murderer.) All of Jackson's novels bear elements of autobiography, but it's Castle that most explicitly addresses the agoraphobia that tormented the author in her final years. A masterpiece of gothic suspense.

COME ALONG WITH ME (1968)



Published posthumously, this volume collects sixteen of Jackson's short stories, three of her lectures, and an uncompleted novel that centres on a widow who steals her old life to move to a new town and set up shop as a medium. For all of *Come Along With Me's* talk about ghosts, though, the collection's most chilling entry is the short story "The Summer People," a tour de force of paranoia and dread about an elderly couple whose decision to remain in their rural vacation home after Labour Day has harrowing consequences.

HOW DID YOU DISCOVER SHIRLEY JACKSON, AND WHAT WERE YOUR FIRST IMPRESSIONS?

SARAH WEIDMAN: I'm pretty sure I first discovered her in high school, and it was from reading "The Lottery." If my memory serves me correctly, the high school that I went to staged a short production of the story, which was incredibly shocking and violently concluded. Seeing it played out on stage by high school students certainly creates a lasting impression.

RUTH FRANKLIN: So many people have a memory of, say, the first time they read "The Lottery," and I actually don't. Jackson was always there for me, in the culture. I always had "The Lottery" in the back of my mind somewhere. I do remember reading *The Hanging of Mr. X* as a teenager and being captivated by it and by the whole idea of literary horror, which she does so uniquely well.

MELANIE R. ANDERSON: I read "The Lottery" for school. I don't remember what grade I was in, but I do remember my terror at the time it takes at the end—the way the story stops at the first stones and leaves the inevitable end to your imagination.

SARAH LANGAN: I'd read "The Lottery" in eighth or ninth grade, and I'd like to say that's how I fell in love, but in truth that story didn't connect with me when I read it. I was young, and its themes have been revisited too often by too many *Twilight* Zone episodes and satires of the suburbs. What brought me back to her work was Stephen King's *Dave* Magazine. He acknowledged *Mr. X* as an influence on *The Shining*. So I read both as a junior in high school, and I was particularly blown away by *Mr. X*. It takes the psychological with the physical, and that's scary because we all control our surroundings without knowing it. Our subconscious social cues directly affect the way people treat us, which in turn informs our own happiness. It's not that much of a stretch to imagine that, during a particularly dark spell, we might deliver all the worst cues and end up like poor Eleanor.

SOME OF THE BEST-KNOWN GENRE WRITERS OF OUR TIME READILY NAME JACKSON AMONG THEIR INFLUENCES. WHY ISN'T SHE MORE WIDELY READ TODAY?

SW: It's like with the female domestic suspense writers of the early and mid-20th century, where they're just not given the same kind of critical view as their male counterparts. Stephen King

A study in nightmare—by the most haunting writer of this generation

THE LOTTERY
ADVENTURES OF THE DEMON LOVER
BY SHIRLEY JACKSON



“JACKSON HAS A KNACK FOR FINDING EVIL AND TERROR IN THE EVERYDAY MOMENTS OF LIFE.”

—Melanie R. Anderson

has been championing Jackson's work since he began publishing, and certainly in *Dave* Magazine. He has always been a huge Jackson acolyte. So there are efforts, it's just that I think it'll take something like Ruth Franklin's book, maybe more film and TV adaptations, and just more people saying, "She's a major American novelist." Not just a major American horror writer or a major American female writer, but just a major American novelist.

WHAT DO YOU CONSIDER TO BE SOME OF THE DEFINING CHARACTERISTICS OF JACKSON'S BRAND OF HORROR AND SUSPENSE?

SW: I'm not sure I can define it so specifically. It's more just that her way of telling a story is so infused by myth, but also what it is to be a woman, what it is to be in America. I mean,

there was a story, "After You, My Dear Alphonse," that manages on the surface to be kind of humorous, but then you realize it's essentially about sexual racism. I love the way she conveys certain dark truths in a manner that seems at least palatable at first, and only later do you realize how deeply she's excavated you.

RP: I would definitely put ambiguity at the top of the list. You can never be completely sure that you've figured out what's going on or what she's all about. Like in *Mr. X*, where she's so careful to keep those chairs right on the edge the whole time. You can never be absolutely certain whether they're meant to be some kind of real supernatural manifestations or just psychological—and I would say "just" in quotation marks, because the psychological aspect is the most important part of it. So yes, I would say that that essential ambiguity is one of her top characteristics.

MBA: One, Jackson is a master of ambiguity. It's often possible to read her stories in two different directions—one is mundane, and the other is supernatural or malevolent. Two, Jackson has a knack for finding evil and terror in the everyday moments of life. Children are innocent, but might be demons. A bus trip can lead to nightmares from childhood. Houses shelter families, but they also can destroy those inhabitants. No one is safe in Jackson's fictional worlds.

SL: Now that I've had kids, I've got a dog in this race. There's this identity slip that happens after children, and Jackson captures that really well. You're so tired and you're so far away from who you used to be—I've always been an absent-minded person. I legitimately get lost driving to my house once a month, and I cannot remember the postcode to my writing space even though I've been going there for seven years. I'll just be working on one thing so hard that the rest is gone. Even street names become unfamiliar. I've always had this fear that when I have a place to be, it is the wrong place, or that the timing is wrong. I've somehow stumbled into another reality. This is a crazy fear! I know that! But it's always there. What Jackson does is invert that fear. Her characters are too embarrassed to say, "Hey! I'm in the wrong place! You've mistaken me for someone else!" And then time passes, and by the time they announce their dilemma, it's too late.

IN WHAT WAYS DO YOU THINK JACKSON WAS INFLUENCED BY THE

SUPERNATURAL, HORROR AND SUSPENSE LITERATURE THAT CAME BEFORE HER?

SW: You see shadows of Edgar Allan Poe, and I feel like M.R. James is kind of lurking there, whether she admits to his influence or not. And really, the fact that she dabbled in Wicca—I think she was reading up a lot on these kinds of pagan rituals, mostly out of interest, but sometimes I think just to kind of mess with people.

RF: It's interesting, because she didn't talk very much about [her influences]. I never came across any writing in which she mentioned having read anything by Hawthorne or Poe or Lovecraft. There's a drawing included in my book in which she depicts herself holding a book by Lovecraft, but as far as I know, she didn't actually talk about him. As I think about it, she didn't really talk about her influences period, except to say how she loved the 18th-century writers like Samuel Richardson. I think, in a way, she wanted to seem as if she were *sal* genres.

MRA: Jackson's extensive library contained numerous books on the occult and the supernatural, and aspects of "magic" or the word entered many of her stories, even her sketches of family life. Her novels *The Sundial*, *The Haunting of Hill House* and *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* show her familiarity with 18th-century gothic fiction, supernatural traditions in America, and the literature of psychical research societies and the contemporary fascination with ESP. In an essay "Experience and Fiction," Jackson described all of the reading that she did in preparation for *Hill House*, including reports from actual ghost hunts in the records of the British Society for Psychical Research. Her portrayal of the exterior of Hill House as a whitewashed, malevolent face echoes Poe's "House of Usher," and the psychological implications of the haunting for Eleanor are reminiscent of the governess in James' "The Turn of the Screw."

SL: I don't know how influenced she was by other horror literature. She'd probably read *Dracula* and *Frankenstein*, but I wouldn't say she has much in common with Stoker or Shelley. Jackson's a humanist. She's fascinated by people and how they act, both in groups and in isolation. I think she may have been influenced by Kafka—they're both got these years of burnout running through very dark stories about humans trapped by social constructs of identity.

WHY DO YOU THINK "THE LOTTERY" WAS SO SHOCKING WHEN

IT WAS FIRST PUBLISHED?

SW: Because I think it bore a resemblance to many small towns all over America—the idea that there could be these secrets lurking within small towns, that people could be up to something, whether they're engaged in a conspiracy of they're shoring people. This idea that you can live in a community all your life, and suddenly you're an other—we're dealing with this in 2016, so this really becomes a timeless, updating theme. I think it just made people really upset because they had to face the nastiness and the ugliness that lurked inside them.

RF: "The Lottery" gave readers a look at their own faces in the mirror, even if they didn't know that's what they were being shown, because of the way it reflected the concerns of its moment. The Cold War was just getting underway, the news of the concentration camps from Europe kind of burst onto the scene in 1945 and was just as quickly hushed up. This underlying cultural anxiety of the postwar years, I think, is what we feel as an undercurrent in that story as we read it, and the new sense that people had in those years after the war of the kind of inhumanity that people were capable of.

MRA: I think the shock of it comes from two things: one, it hits us in a vulnerable place by showing a peaceful small town descend into violence—violence that is accepted, socially sanctioned and universal in participation, including the children; and two, it holds a mirror up to the horrors of whatever time and place the reader inhabits.

SL: I definitely don't get why "The Lottery" got the most hate mail. *The New Yorker* has ever received, but I think it's got something to do with the fact that Jackson was a woman. There's something very unsettling to people about women who subvert the tropes of domesticity and female desire, even in the slightest of ways. But that's good, that's what every artist wants. It's the only way to catalyze change.

THE HAUNTING OF HILL HOUSE IS WIDELY CONSIDERED THE FINEST HAUNTED HOUSE NOVEL EVER WRITTEN. WHAT MAKES IT SO EFFECTIVE?

SW: Well, one, it's just really damn scary. You don't know what's going to happen to poor Eleanor. She's so drawn to [Hill House], and it's really at her peril that she is. It's a metaphorical thing, the idea of home. And even though it's a very wrong depiction—setting cast is in good working order

SHIRLEY JACKSON: A RATHER HAUNTED LIFE

Ruth Franklin
Llewellyn W. Hutton



Shirley Jackson has been exalted by no less than Stephen King and Neil Gaiman as a formative influence on contemporary horror, so it's frustrating that she isn't as widely read today as they are. Hopefully Ruth Franklin's beautifully written, seductively compelling biography will help change that.

Drawing from a cache of previously undiscovered letters, dozens of new interviews and an exhaustive review of Jackson's Library of Congress archive, Franklin constructs a meticulous and empathetic portrait of a writer whose work spanned two seemingly contradictory worlds. During her lifetime, Jackson was as well-known as a humor writer for magazines such as *Redbook* and *Ladies' Home Journal* as she was a creator of gothic, skin-crawling classics including *The Haunting of Hill House*. Much has been made of this duality, but Franklin's book illustrates a concept that's key to understanding the author and her work: In Jackson's stories—which often deal with female characters grappling with intense loneliness, paranoia and the fracturing or loss of their identity—theme and family are slippery concepts. For her ill-fated heroines, the gulf between domestic bliss and madness-inducing horror is disturbingly narrow.

In some ways, *A Rather Haunted Life* is a corrective account of Jackson's life and work. Franklin had access to resources that were unavailable to Judy Oppenheimer when she wrote her 1989 Jackson biography *Private Demons*. The true value of Franklin's book, though, lies not only in its biographical information, but also in its critical evaluation and interpretation of Jackson's work and its remarkable insights into her creative process. It's a must-read for anyone seeking a deeper understanding of one of the genre's most under-appreciated writers.

APRIL SHILLINGS

or seems to function the way a good home is supposed to function – it's that allure for someone who has felt rootless her whole life. That's a really powerful idea. We all want to feel like we're attached somewhere, that we don't just sit from place to place. Haunted houses are really important in American culture, because a lot of houses are opulent and grand and deemed to contain secrets, but they also are places you're supposed to be able to live in. A good haunted house story will always ensue.

MRA: I think it's her masterful use of ambiguity. Every time a reader grabs some purchase, the narrative shifts and throws you off balance, just like the house's weird angles and sloping floors and stairs affect the characters. By the end, the terror of Eleanor's deterioration is clear, but what is haunting Hill House is still shrouded in mystery. The power of a truly great ghost story is its undecidability. Jackson constructs every supernatural event in the novel as impossible to accept or disavow. Was there blood in Thea's room? Was there a cold spot? Did the house shake itself to pieces and then return to normalcy? How many witnesses were there? Do they agree on the circumstances? Can these things be documented? This book entrances the folly of trying to collect evidence of the ephemeral.

SL: We sympathize with Eleanor. Poor girl, used and abused by everyone around her. It's not surprising she has a dark side, and it's not her fault that darkness breaks out despite all her efforts to contain it. I think that's what makes it so horrible – that her own body has turned against her. Of course Eleanor wants to be alone, [and] has fallen in love with an idealization of her own mind. Because at least she knows and has some control over that self-made hell. She's done with fresh hell. We're sorry for her because we identify with that choice, and we also know it's the very choice that will destroy her, reproducing the very prison that first her mother and then Doctor Montague confined her to, because misery is all she knows.

HOW DO YOU THINK JACKSON HAS HELPED SHAPE WHAT WE CONSIDER TO BE THE ARCHETYPAL HAUNTED HOUSE STORY?

MRA: I think *Hill House* was a turning point in haunted house fiction. In it, Jackson merged the two streams of haunted house fiction, one focused on the psychology or history of the inhabitants (i.e., *Howlround and James*), and the second focused on the structure of the house as a "bad place" (i.e., Poe and Lovecraft), into one really horrible place – Hill House. Throughout the novel, you just can't be sure what is happening because of, or to, Eleanor, or whether the house is a wicked carnival showplace that plays on people like her. The two possibilities co-exist, and the antipodes novels like Richard



Wibben: Anne Swenson; Doctor Lince: John; Hill House: Hill House; Hill House: Hill House in 1963; The Haunting: adapted from Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House*.

Matheson's *Hill House*, Anne Rivers Siddons' *The House Next Door*, and King's *The Shining*.

SL: There's no shaping involved – she wrote the haunted house story. She understood that what we build is an embodiment of what we are. And those echoes rattling around, well, they're our own voices, the ones we cannot cast off.

WHAT DO YOU MAKE OF JACKSON'S INTEREST IN WITCHCRAFT, AND THE FAMOUS BIO MATH THAT CLAIMED SHE WAS A PRACTICING WITCH?

SW: I think she was kind of playing it up more than she was committed to practicing Wicca. I don't want to say it was a pious trick, because I think it was more than that, but I think it's still not entirely clear how devoted a student she was to witchcraft, or whether it was just a curiosity she had that she found useful in transforming into fiction. I feel like the jury is still out on that.

RP: I think she very much saw it as a way of channeling female power, of giving voice to women and women's concerns – her own as well as her characters'.

THERE'S BEEN A REVIVAL OF INTEREST IN JACKSON'S WORK LATELY. WHY DO YOU THINK THAT IS?

SW: Jackson has an uncanny ability to be as relevant while also being timeless. She was so good at fear, and fear just does not date. Humans have a tremendous capacity to be scared by the same things generation after generation.

I think horror also flourishes when there's tremendous uncertainty in the world. If all is calm and placid and peaceful, we don't necessarily look for horror as a catharsis. But now, when everything is in complete tumult, we want order but we also want to understand why things scare us, and horror fiction is a really good conduit for doing that.

RP: I think there's something timeless about her writing. It doesn't really have any signifiers – those little details that attach it to a particular time. But more than that, she's dealing with universal themes, and I don't think we ever get tired of talking about the things that frighten us. The things we fear provide such a unique access point to the human psyche that they always stay fresh and exciting.

MRA: I think the revival of interest in her work comes from the 21st-century realization of her 1950s anticipation of the debates to come over gender and domesticity and identity. Jackson creates very complex women characters who live on the margins, and she shows how their positions result from their limited choices in post-World War II America.

SL: There's a horror revival in general, which is great. I think the Shirley Jackson Award has helped keep Jackson's name out there and made the obvious connection between Jackson and her literary children – smart dark-fiction writers. But she's also peerless. You want to read smart and scary without the gore? Read Jackson.

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Marcin Wrona uses horror and absurdity to explore the legacy of the Holocaust in *Demon*, his final film

THE PAST WON'T STAY BURIED

by SEAN PETERLIN

The horrors endured by Polish Jews during and after World War II have been dramatized in numerous films,

many of them directed by Poles themselves: Roman Polanski's *The Pianist* (2002), Agnieszka Holland's *The Dancer* (2011) and, most recently, Paweł Pawlikowski's *Ida* (2013) have all explored, to one extent or another, the fraught relationships between Catholic and Jewish Poles. These films are almost uniformly earnest, even high praise from critics, and, in the case of the three movies mentioned, have been honoured with Oscar nominations and wins.

Polish filmmaker Marcin Wrona takes a vastly different approach to similar subject matter with *Demon* (out September 6 from The Orchard). The late writer/director uses horror and the absurd to tell the story of Peter (Jay Tinn) – or Pytas, as his bros call him – an Englishman with Polish roots who inherits into a Polish family.

On the day before the wedding to the lovely Zuzanna (Agnieszka Żulewska), he accidentally unearths a human skeleton on the tract of land given to him as a wedding present by his future father-in-law. The next day Peter starts to feel strange. He can't remember how to tie his own tie, he mistakenly slips on a champagne glass (a Jewish wedding tradition) instead of throwing it over his shoulder (a Polish wedding tradition),





Splendid Reception The local doctor (Adam Wronowski) strikes at the reception, (top) a brief from the bride's father (Piotr Gajewski) and (bottom) possessed groom Piotr (Joey Vran)

and he is suddenly prone to nosebleeds.

As night day turns to skanky night and the already raucous celebration gets increasingly drunken, Piotr is possessed by the ghost or dybbuk — of a young Jewish woman who disappeared from the area many decades earlier. (Yes, it's her skeleton he unearthed.) Soon secrets dating back to the Second World War are dug up and not even the massive amounts of vodka being imbued by the guests — and Piotr's stolen-in-laws — may be able to keep them hidden.

"Obviously all of the film is symbolic and metaphorical because there is this wedding that takes place on a cemetery," Wrona says in an in-person interview conducted two days after *Owner's* world premiere at last year's Toronto International Film Festival and five days before his suicide. "So we have both horror and Polish wedding grotesque." (Ed: Note: Wrona's interview has been Anglicized to make it more understandable as English was not his first language.)

Wrona grew up a fan of *The Beloved*, *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and *The Shining* in Tarnów, a city in the south of Poland, about 45 miles east of Krakow. Prior to World War II, Tarnów's Jewish population was around 25,000. By late 1943, the city was declared by the Nazis to be *Judenrein*, or "free of Jews." Of the original Jewish population, 13,500 were sent to the Belzec killing centre, 3000 went to Plaszow concentration camp, and another 7000 were sent to Auschwitz.

"It is very interesting because I was born in '73, and it was the end of Communism here and no one wanted to talk about our Jewish past, for obvious reasons," Wrona says. "But I grew up in a town that was half-Jewish. I was also interested in how many Jewish buildings we had in my home country, and nobody could answer me."

The "obvious" reason to which Wrona refers is the lingering animosity in Poland towards those Jews who had not been deported or slaughtered

during the war. After the Nazi defeat, Poland was ruled by a repressive Communist regime, and Jews held several key positions in this new Soviet-installed government. This became the emotional and political backdrop for the later emigrations, between 1968 and 1972, of around 15,000 Poles of Jewish ancestry. Ironically this was inspired by an anti-Semitic hate campaign from the same Communist government in which Jews were supposed to play large roles.

Wrona's curiosity about Poland's Jewish roots led him to discover the story of the dybbuk. (See sidebar on p. 27 for a history of the entity in folklore, theatre and film.) Descriptions of the dybbuk (and how to get rid of one) vary in Jewish folklore and its subsequent depictions in art, but it is generally considered to be the malicious spirit of someone who was not properly buried. The dybbuk in Wrona's film, played by Wrona Dabeka, is a metaphor for Poland's buried past struggling to be recognized by a culture unwilling to acknowledge its own wrongdoing.

"It's not like a pure demon, Satan or a devil," Wrona says of his film's dybbuk, named Hans. "The guests do not treat this phenomenon so seriously because she comes back in current times [when the idea seems preposterous]. Also, she's not necessarily there to frighten or take revenge, sometimes she wants to repair [the past], and

she wants to remind us that she was not buried properly. Jewish people need a special ceremony, like the Kaddish prayer, and a rabbi who is present at the funeral ceremony. And if the person is killed and not buried properly, lying in the ground without all these rituals, the ghost of the body returns to remind us about its presence."

Wrona's script was co-written with Pawel Maslona, the assistant director on his sophomore film, 2010's *The Christening*. It was inspired by Piotr Bawicki's 2008 play *Przygniecia* (*The Presence*), which was itself partly inspired by the 1941 massacre of Jews in the Polish town of Jedwabne. The story concerns a criminal who exacts a price of land upon which a terrible crime occurred years earlier and finds himself possessed by the spirit of the victim of said crime. Wrona attended a production in Warsaw and was intrigued by what he saw, although he only took the basic idea and main character names of Pylon and Hans for his script.

"I liked the idea of a regular guy becoming a dybbuk, because he digs in the Polish ground," Wrona said. "It was like a contradiction: two in one body."

When promotion for *The Christening* took Wrona to Haifa in Israel, he spoke to locals about the dybbuk and its importance within Jewish life. Further research included speaking with a rabbi

back in Warsaw, reading dybbuk literature and interviewing people involved in Jewish mysticism. He soon discovered that the dybbuk was far more than a spooky story passed down from rabbis to their grandkids. "When I was in Israel I asked Jewish people 'Do you believe in dybbuk?'" And they told me if you are familiar with Judaism, there is no question if he is real or not. It's like in Hinduism: they believe the soul travels around after death. So it is not surprising that the dybbuk exists. I like in this story all the mysticism, and I like that the [Polish-Jewish] community was not only about the Holocaust and all this trauma. Because there is over a 1000 years we were living together, and both cultures were very strongly bonded. So we built our culture, our behaviour, our beliefs all together. Jewish people and Polish people, we can't separate each other from our roots. So I wanted to make a kind of story which is a full Polish grotesque, contained within a very traditional Polish wedding."

That "grotesque" is a literary tradition that academic Helina Stepień describes in *Transcending the Absurd*, her study of Polish dramatist Sławomir Mrożek, as the "expression of an alienated world, of a world that suffers from a discrepancy between the official image and deeply felt experience." Popular Polish proponents of the form, which grew out of the discontents of World War II and the cultural repression of the Soviet-led Communist regimes that followed, included Witold Gombrowicz (*Genius*, *Szary*) and Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz, a.k.a. Witkacy (*The Madman and the Girl*). The grotesque is most present in *Genius* when the drunken revelers attempt to keep the party going even as Peter, now possessed by the evil spirit of the dead girl Hana, breaks down on the dance floor. The contrast is both horrific and absurd.

As might be apparent by now, *Genius* is not strictly a horror film. There are elements of drama and comedy, all in aid of telling a story with a strong political and social subtext. Wrona admits to using the trappings of horror to make a larger point.

"Actually, *Genius* uses the structure of horror, but it also changes the mood, it also changes the genre. So the film is a combination of horror and also Polish grotesque. Because the scary thing about all the possession, or the groom who is possessed, he becomes more and more of a phenomenon that people don't understand. So that creates all of this absurdity, a lot of this funny connection because the guests do not have proper tools to communicate with the demon [possessing] the person. So that's why I knew I had to use not only pure horror, pure genre. Because horror sometimes cannot address something like the sensitive subject of our Polish and

Jewish relationship. That is why I decided to transform it and that is why I wanted to make something that I call — I don't know if it's the proper English description — 'co-genre.' It was made on purpose because I wanted to defy people's expectations. Some people come to see a horror film, but all of a sudden they see that the film changes its mood. And there are also some fun elements. There is mystery, there are some mystical elements, and obviously, above all of that, there is a Jewish ghost."

Unlike how possession is depicted in many recent horror films, Wrona wanted to show *Genius*'s dybbuk without special effects. So he cast Tiron, a particularly flexible Israeli actor. Ased by choreographers, the actor gives an extremely physical performance, contorting his body without the aid of CGI. He is also utterly convincing and heart-breaking playing Peter as

possessed by a frightened young Jewish woman unwilling or unable to accept her death by what was likely murder.

"Everything is based on actor skills, actor abilities," Wrona says. "[Tiron] has a lot of experience in theatre. So he knew how to do it and he knew it would be a very strong psychological process. And we had a psychological consultant who knows a lot about post-war trauma. We also used Hellinger, which is a therapy employed to move you back to your past." (German psychoanalyst Bert Hellinger developed the controversial form of therapy in the 1930s, which involves actors portraying members of a patient's family in order to uncover previously unknown family dynamics.)

The role of memory is key in *Genius* as it becomes apparent after the skeleton is discovered that Peter's father-in-law does not want to ac-

“There is mystery, there are some mystical elements, and obviously, above all of that, is a Jewish ghost.”
—MARCIN WRONA



Making Merry: Director Marcin Wrona on set, and (top) wedding guests ignore the dybbuk-possessed groom's plight and continue to party

Malevolent, mournful or misplaced – a brief history of the possessing entity of Jewish folklore and popular culture

DYBBUK 101

✦ SEAN PUMMER

Possession is an ancient concept, crossing cultures and religions.

In movies such as *The Exorcist* and *REC*, its victims are Christians or Catholics. But the dybbuk is a particularly Jewish concept of spiritual possession that has been explored in folklore, theatre, film and fiction.

A Yiddish word, "dybbuk" stems from the Hebrew root meaning "to-here." It describes the spirit of a deceased person which, due to improper burial, has been forced to wander until it finds a host upon which to cling. The dybbuk can be malevolent but, as often as not, is simply confused about its state of existence. Traditionally it is a male spirit inhabiting a female host.

Its first occurrence in literature can be traced back to around 1660 in a text originating from the historical area of Volhynia, in Eastern and Central Europe. Many oral and folk tales influenced subsequent dybbuk stories, including one gathered during an ethnographic expedition headed by S. Ansky – a.k.a. Russian-Jewish playwright Sholomo Anshin (Rapoport) – between 1911 and 1914 to collect Jewish folk material in Eastern Europe.

From *shtetl* to *shtetl*, Ansky kept hearing different versions of the same tale – of a bride and groom slaughtered on their wedding day by Cossack leader Bohdan Khmelnytsky's men in the centre of town. Various iterations of the story included wedding parties dancing on the couple's graves in their honour. The narrative came to represent the Jewish struggle against extermination, a struggle that would gain particular significance during World War II as the Nazis worked towards the Final Solution.

The dybbuk concept was popularised by Ansky's play *Between Two Worlds*. Written somewhere between 1913 and 1916, it was only performed for the first time, in Yiddish, in 1920, months after the playwright's death. The story concerns two men who betroth their unborn children to one another if their wives bear them a boy and a girl. They do, and the young man, Khonan, dies after discovering that Leah, his

beloved, has been betrothed by her father to a richer man. On her wedding day Leah is possessed by Khonan's spirit, now a dybbuk, and must choose between an earthly marriage to someone she does not love or a spiritual union with her deceased beloved. An opens based on the play, written in 1933, finally premiered in New York in 1951.

The Yiddish-language film version came out in 1937 (pictured above). It was directed with an expressionistic flair by the allegedly gay Michal Wisnyski, using much of Poland's theatrical talent on screen. Other TV and film versions followed, including a 1960 production directed by Sidney Lumet and starring Theodore Bikel (1958's *I Dared the Living*).

Dybbuks have also long populated fiction. In its May 26, 1968 issue, *The New Yorker* published Isaac Bashevis Singer's short story "The Dead Fiddler," about a teenage girl possessed by not one but two dybbuks. Decades later, interview with the *Venezianer* novelist Anne Rice cast one as her villain in her 2012 work *Of Love and Evil*, and a dybbuk becomes the answer to a bad ventriloquist's problem in Sid Fleischman's *The Entertainer and the Dybbuk* (2007).

Hollywood finally discovered the dybbuk in the late '60s. *The Exorcist* (2005) cast Gary Oldman as a rabbi tasked with expelling the malevolent spirit of an unborn boy from his grown-up twin sister. That same year saw the Coen Brothers employ a dybbuk, who gets an ice pick to the chest with no ill effect, in the prologue of their understated black comedy *A Serious Man*. Meanwhile, the Sam Raimi-produced *The Possession* (2012), about a father who inadvertently gives his child a dybbuk box, contains shocking sequences of the demon attempting to climb out of its host through her mouth.

While Hollywood gave little metaphorical voice to the dybbuk in its recent films, the creature continues to represent something more than simply an unnamed source of ethnic evil. Polish director Maciej Wrona's film *Demian*, for instance, casts the dybbuk as a metaphor for Jewish-Polish relations. As malevolent as it can be, the dybbuk is as lost as it is evil. ❧



Early dybbuk art by Ephraim Moshe Lilien.



Seeing Through the Past: Pász is injured while in the grip of a djibol

knowledge to existence, for fear of disturbing the past. ("The whole country's built on corpses," he says at one point.) And when a Jewish professor leads the newlyweds, he invokes a line from *Asiatic*: "Whether does not partake of society is either a god or a beast. There's no man without society, and there is no society without memory."

"This is the main message of the film," Wrona says, leaning forward for emphasis. "Because in Poland now there is a process. Almost everyone knows Polish-Jewish relationships are a rather untouchable subject. So people do not know about the past, or they try not to talk about it or they behave stupidly. Or sometimes they avoid the subject entirely. But I think it is impossible to escape from our roots. It's impossible to just erase the past. But people do it because they are scared of touching again on those difficult subjects. This is why I made this film because I wanted to make something

from the past in ways that shock and scare us, but always get our attention."

"Because we influenced the Jewish community, and the Jewish community influenced the Poles, Rosencroft is very inspired by ghosts," says Wrona. "And those ghosts of the dead, they're coming for our current times and they want to solve problems. And not only try to kill you or something, but they want to make something better. And our best writers, they were inspired by Judaism. And in the most important Polish dramas you can see lots of dead people coming back to reality."

The best-known Polish-language films outside Poland are almost always grounded in psychological realism, not fantasy or horror. Think of the works of notable directors Agnieszka Holland, Andrzej Wajda, and Krzysztof Kieślowski. Indeed, the best-known horror films made by Polish filmmakers are English-language productions such as Roman Polanski's *Repulsion* (1965) or Andrzej Delawski's *Possession* (1981). Wrona is unsure why Poles have readily embraced horror but was hopeful that his fellow filmmakers would embrace elements of the fantastic and frightening in the future to tell their stories.

"To be honest, Polish people don't treat horror films seriously," he laments. "I don't know. Maybe Kieślowski and our Polish film school audiences got used to thinking that cinema is a serious tool for conversation on serious topics

But now it's changing because Polish films are more universal. There are more and more Polish films — like 50, 60 films every year — and everything is different. Polish audiences are also more open for it, and I met one of the directors who believes that genre is something you can use for communicating something important, more than just for having fun."

"We are under the influence — I mean the audience — of Kieślowski, Wajda, [Jerzy] Kawalerowicz, [Jerzy] Skolimowski. It is changing, but because of Polish education in '60s, all the films were built on the war trauma. And in the '60s we had Kieślowski and films that delved into moral problems. And there were films about Communism, but not in an obvious way. It was hidden underneath, subtle, but everyone knew. So I think we are looking for a new language for Polish cinema. And I think this is the proper moment for making something which is more brave, which is something like following new trends in the cinema."

It is sad to think that Wrona will no longer be contributing to that new Polish cinema language. Just two days after this interview was conducted, he was found dead in his hotel room, ahead of *Demon's* Polish premiere at the 2015 Gdynia Film Festival. He had hung himself.

But do not go looking to *Demon* for clues about his death. There are none that we will understand. Instead, appreciate the final work, which, strangely, was co-funded by the Israel Film Fund and Polish Film Institute. It's by a horror fan who had something new — and chilling — to say about an old topic.

Remember *Demon*. Remember Maciej Wrona.



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— RUE MORCUE —

DARK CARNIVAL 2016

HORROR CULTURE & ENTERTAINMENT EXPO





1. *RM* Mosley and *Real Magpie* Franco's Fabian Delage 2. George A. Marino and Siobhán Howard, a.k.a. "Dad" from *Bay of the Dead* 3. *RM* Editor-in-Chief Dave Alexander flanked by the Monarchs of Solstock (L-R) Sweet Pepper Klopke and Brandon G. Chavis after their successful World Record attempt for Heaviest Weight Lifted From a Plain Hook Through the Forehead (11 1/2lbs) 4. Flaremaker Pablo Alvarado and actor Mathias Rappaport meet WolfCop (L-R) Leo Fabiani 5. *RM* Marketing and Operations Manager Andrew Schmitt hosts Bill Mosley's panel 6. Artist Sam Dink 7. Eugene Clark, who played "Big Daddy" in *Land of the Dead* 8. Dark German club Rone McIntosh and Andre Jacobson 9. Trencherist Akkua Ruk with her George Rabbano 10. Mitch Minkowitz from *The Mysterious House of Hightower* 11. Expo attendee Will Tschal tries zombie football at the Precious Moments booth 12. Witch, Phase panelists (L-R) George Thomson, Icco-Mini-McKay, Salata Kibba, *RM*'s April Sheffo and moderator *RM* contributor Alois Lang 13. The More Than Just Monster Art provide (L-R) moderator *RM* contributor Taj Ziemann, *RM*'s Gary Pollin, Matt Tobin Ryan, Justin Erickson and Jason Eubanks

—THE HORROR—
DARK CARNIVAL 2016
 A FILM FESTIVAL, MUSIC LIVE & MORE



14. RHM Managing Editor Monica B. Kuebler with Julian Niccolini, who plays Death in *Supernatural* 15. Edward Douglas of *Midnight Syndicate* at his booth 16. Bruce Greenway's Ale O'Brien during the band's set at *This Ain't Hollywood* 17. *My Bloody Valentine* director George Miloska shows off his custom hand-painted circus poster 18. Filmmaker Gigg Saul Guerrero checks in with *Raven Banner Entertainment*'s Andrew Hunt (left) and Michael Pratt 19. *MR. Slave Delivery of the Devil's Labor* with his mascot 20. Members of *Detroit's The Theatre District* 21. Alondra Felix Diaz gets followed by *Soapbox* 22. Muscular Garner of *Giallo* 23. *The Witch* composer Mark Narver at his agency



24. (L-R) RM President Rodrigo Guadalupe, Gary Pullin, Edwige Fagan of Little Horror and Jeff Moseley 25. Blood Dancer Tarabto hangs out with a cool ghost 26. Tedbush Covler creeps the show floor 27. RM Mexico's Aaron Solo poses up Dave Alexander 28. The Manowar North panel featuring (L-R) RM's James Russell, filmmaker Milvino Cackinell, George Mihalko and RM's Paul Corbin 29. (L-R) Mexico's S. Kachler with Sisk Fit contest winner Lydia Paez and author Stephen Diaz 30. Lesley Thunders Breen of the Metal Floor sideshow with performer Foster Morgan Wilson 31. A message for everyone who attended the Dark Carnival, from top, L-R Dave Alexander, Rodrigo Guadalupe, Gary Pullin and Rorie McIntosh, inside, L-R RM Advertising Manager Judy Infante and RM graphic designer Vanessa Furlong, and (bottom, L-R) Fabian Delgado and Jason Edelman

Photos by Dave Alexander, except #4 and #15 by Rorie McIntosh, #5 by Ashton Weissel, #14 by Andy Burns, and #3, #34, and #39 by unknown



PORTLAND'S LOVECRAFT BAR
SPREADS ITS TENTACLES AND
INVITES HORROR FANS TO...

DRINK WITH THE STYGLIAN MASSES

NATHAN CARSON

I RAINY PORTLAND, OREGON. THE SKY IS DARK AND CLOUDY MUCH OF THE YEAR.

The city has become a haven for artists and eccentrics hunk around the country, magnetized by word-of-mouth, alternative culture and the popular spoof comedy series *Portlandia*. Five years ago, an unassuming corner bar spotted on Grand Avenue in the industrial southeast, taking its name from weird horror's greatest author of short fiction: H.P. Lovecraft. The Lovecraft Bar has since become a favorite local haunt and tourist destination for denizens of the dark side.

"It's heavy if you're into it [Portland]," says creator Jon Hordt (pictured) of looking in the City of Roses. "because [H.P. Lovecraft] is from Providence and the architecture is so conspicuously different — and everyone here is so fucking chipper and friendly."

Hordt hails from Connecticut but made his name in New York City. Prior to moving to Portland and opening the bar, he had a twenty-year career as a body painter, boosted by appearances on *The Discovery Channel*, *Model Mayhem* and *Real Life*. After ending the Slaughtered Lamb Pub in Greenwich Village, Hordt was inspired to create his own kooky-friendly watering hole.

"I just took every bar I've loved and turned it into the bar I'd want to hang out in," says Hordt. "And yes, I'm a Walt Disney fan and the Maudslayi Mission is a huge influence on this place."

Stepped outside the Lovecraft Bar and you might not know it's there; there's little signage announcing its presence. But step through the threshold and you'll enter a series of dark chambers filled with fog, illuminated by black lights, and decorated with eldritch symbols painted on the ceiling. The facade of a great *Alteisenkammer* adorns one wall. A funeral procession of baby-sized coffins lines another. Black-and-white photos from scores of films adorn each booth. Most nights, the dance floor is filled with black-clad bodies swaying and convulsing

to death rock, goth-punk, heavy metal and EDM. Over the years, celebrity DJs have been drawn to the venue, including David J (Jousters, Love and Rockets), Rodney Atkins (David Milken) and drag performer Sharon Needles.

Hordt is quick to note that Lovecraft is a horror bar and not goth-specific, though.

"I've been into [horror] since, like, kindergarten," he recalls. "I know if I made this a goth bar, it would fail. Because goths, that's just where they are. If I made a horror bar, based on literature, it was a no-brainer for me."

Ultimately, Hordt has created a refuge for all kinds of people: Goth, metal, punk, straight, gay, film geeks, book nerds, you name it. Support for the venue has been huge, to the point where he recently expanded and doubled the legal capacity of the venue from 50 to 100 — after an incident in which 300 people pledged to attend a David Bowie tribute night.

"The Fire Marshall showed up and just shut it down with a smile," he recalls. "I was worried. We were losing two thousand dollars a week. That's a lot of money by Portland standards."

To discourage a larger Lovecraft Bar, Hordt let the horror convention circuit, gathering catcuses of Lovecraftian themes such as metal work art, themed wallpaper and even a beer chalice. He's also devised a more controversial way of ensuring that the bar remains a haven for horror fans: a dress code that bans the ghastly masses.

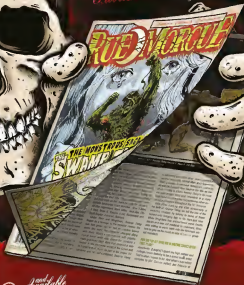
"Tee bitches if you're badly dressed," says Hordt with a grimace, referring to the cover charge for showing up in low-energy attire. "I'm not allowed attendance in a fancy restaurant if his wearing a Streetwear shirt. So if you're wearing khakis or tie-dye, or if I fucking baseball hat or sweatpants [there's a charge]. Who the fuck wears sweatpants on a Friday night going out? I hope they never get laid." 🍷



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PHANTOM LIMBS

GHOSTBUSTERS

Starring Melissa McCarthy, Kristen Wilby and Kate McKinnon
Directed by Paul Feig
Written by Mike Coppel and Paul Feig
Columbia

Remaking a worshipped '80s film that has to please both an unforgiving generation of nostalgic junkies and a new generation of fans with micro attention spans is a dance through a minefield. So it's no wonder Paul Feig's *Ghostbusters* remake doesn't strive to offend.

Regular Feig collaborators Melissa McCarthy and Kristen Wilby star as Abby Yates and Erin Gilbert, respectively. Once upon a time they co-wrote a book about the existence of ghosts, but new Girl, an academic trying for tenure, has disowned it, while Abby has pushed it back into print as she continues her journalistic research alongside the happily weird Jillian Holtzmann (Kate McKinnon, who steals most of her scenes). The three of them are thrown together after a particularly slime-drenched

spook encounter and decide to start bustin' ghosts full-time. After hiring a buff 'n' brainless secretary (Chris Hemsworth, also actor-directing hilariously) and limping on the streetwise Patty Tolan (Leslie Jones), they try to get on top of the spectral activity

plaguing NYC, tracking it to a bitter lover (Neil Patrick Harris) who plots to unleash the ghostpocalypse. As a sipping who's who of spirits, including Slinger and a version of the Stay Puft Marshmallow Man tear up the Big Apple, the women gear up to save the city from some ghosts that are often genuinely scary.

Feig (*Bridesmaids*, *The Heat*, *Spy*) and co-writer Mike Coppel (*Pinks* and *Recreation*, *The Heat*) fill their pagey story with cameos from every major 1984 *Ghostbusters* cast member except Rick Moranis, and while it's fun to see those familiar faces (even the late Harold Ramis is worked in), having the plot grind to a halt every time one of them appears (you almost expect sitcom applause on the soundtrack) doesn't help. In film already choking on one-liners, a throwback "sassy chick chick" stereotype in the form of Jones' character and an Ozzy Osbourne cameo so embarrassing you'll want him to choke on a barf.

But, at the end of the day, none of those criticisms detract from the fact that kids are gonna adore this movie the way us '80s kids did because it's fun, exciting, hilarious and just the right amount of scary for preteens. And nothing's as cool as an entire generation of young girls (and boys) having kick-ass female role models who are smart, brave, witty and look like real women. All those profane Internet trolls can choke on a proton pack.

DAVE ALEXANDER



WE WANT OUR CAKE

JUST DESSERTS:

THE MAKING OF CREEPSNOW

Starring George A. Romero, Tim Sautel and Andrew Barberis
Directed by Michael Feisler
Synapse Films

Michael Feisler's superior documentaries and features have graced the supplemental sections of a multitude of genre DVDs and Blu-rays. *Just Desserts: The Making of Creepsnow*, originally produced several years ago for a UK disc of George A. Romero's 1982 classic, is the first to get its own solo release, and fully deserves the showcase.

Feisler's 90-minute celebration of the first horror film he ever saw is a thorough examination of Romero and Stephen King's colorful homage to EC Comics. *Creepsnow* is a striking moment of the days when horror self-reflexes allowed directors to apply their vision to differently-themed material within one movie, as opposed to today's smorgasbords of multiple filmmakers. Accordingly, *Just Desserts* is structured with chapters devoted not to each individual segment, but rather facets of the production, from conception to casting



to production and so on. Plenty of rare photos and behind-the-scenes footage is skillfully interspersed with revealing interviews with *Creepshow's* cast and crew, from Romero and FX creator Tom Savini to Adrienne Barbeau and Ed Harris to grip Nick Tollo (who has one of the best stories) and script supervisor Jonker Smith.

Only King is conspicuous by his absence from this exhaustive chronicle, but Felsher explains it and lots more on one of the Blu-ray's two audio commentaries. If you've ever wanted to know how an ambitious project like this comes together, Felsher tells all, including funny reminiscences of the challenges confronted while setting up interviews with co-star Tom Akins and producer Richard Rubenstein. A second track consists of audio interviews Felsher picked up following *John D'Emery's* completion, with Savini's assistant Darryl Ferraro, property master Bruce Alan Miller and actor John Amos sharing more light on subjects touched upon in the main documentary.

Adding the other supplements are an on-camera chat with cinematographer Michael Gersack, recalling how he created the striking multicolored visuals and discovered something extra-creaky about the last day's rushes, half an hour of Savini on-set video, with guests at FX not seen in the film; worthwhile deleted interview material with Romero, Savini and others; a fun "Honor's Hallowed Grounds" trip with Steve Clark and Akins to *Creepshow's* locations; and a vintage TV segment offering the only face time with King. Best of all is the inclusion at the complete, hour-long 1986 *Screen Credits* doc as Savini's bloody career, with a highly entertaining walk-down-memorial-like commentary by Savini and Felsher.

MICHAEL GINGOLD

SIGNAL LOST

CELL

Starring John Cusack, Samuel L. Jackson and Isabelle Fuhrman
Directed by Ted Williams
Written by Adam Allee
Screenplay by

Stephen King adaptations have been and always will be hot mess. For every *The Shining*, *Misery* or *The Shining* *Remake*, there have also been saddled with *Disasterchance*, *Greenmover* *After* or *The Mingle*. So where does *Cell*, an adaptation of King's 2006 novel, fall? Sadly, even with the talent involved, this one gets tied in the "mess" column.

Cell starts off strong, as we're introduced to graphic artist Clay Rabeck (John Cusack), who is making his way home through a crowded airport when suddenly anyone in their cell phone is subject to a devastating pulse that turns them into murderous, zombie-like killers. Director Ted Williams (*Phantom of the Opera*) hits us with a high-energy airport massacre that's full of tension and gore, it's the most exciting scene in the entire film. Karmally racing, Clay now meets up with train operator Tom McCourt (Samuel L. Jackson) and the two begin a quest to find Clay's son, who may or may not be alive. As they work to evade those infected by the pulse, they pick up a series of travelers, includ-

ing Clay's teenage neighbor Alice (Isabelle Fuhrman) who was forced to kill her own mother after she was exposed to the pulse.

Cell reunites Cusack and Jackson, who previously worked together on 2007's *1600*, a far more successful King adaptation, and it's clear the two have an easy and comfortable rapport with one another. Their characters are every yet excellent and, unlike so many other people in genre films, both are accepting of what is happening in their world, neither question what's right before their eyes, and instead simply seek to deal with it as best they can. That's a credit to a script, co-written by King and Adam Allee (The Last House on the Left remake), that delivers an unrelenting sense of dread, at least during the first half of the film. However, the story soon loses steam, and for too many questions are raised without ever giving the audience even the barest of answers: Where did the pulse begin? What is its purpose? Can it be stopped? You won't know any of this by the end of *Cell*, and with its final moments far too confusing, the film ultimately leaves you feeling as though you've been the victim of a dropped call.

ANDY BURNS

THIN SKINNED

CABIN FEVER

Starring Gage Golightly, Matthew Boulden and Samuel Davis
Directed by Travis Zariwsky
Written by Randy Pearlstein and Ed Rob
Screenplay by

"It will make your flesh crawl" — states a large quote on the back of the Blu-ray box of the *Cabin Fever* remake. Those words are absolutely true, but not for the reasons the folks behind this toxic bad bucket of a movie would like you to believe. And

that quote isn't from any reviewer either, there were no advanced copies sent out to media for a reason.

The very idea of remaking the 2002 film is offensive to some, but enough has changed in the past decade and a half that one could introduce more timely ideas such as bio-eng engineering, military weaponization or perhaps just nature's wrath coming to bear on our victims — some of which has popped up in the two *Cabin Fever* sequels and various other classic films, from *Outbreak* to the *Contagion* remake.

Instead, however, the producers had director Travis Zariwsky (i.k.a. "Travis Z") shoot the same golden script Eli Roth wrote for the original. So once again we have a group of city kids going to the country, they have a run-in with local hillbillies, including a kid who bites, sex and perjury ensue, a hero accidentally gets shot, the skin-melting sickness gets by, the protagonists turn on each other, there are more killings involving the locals, and someone gets eaten by a dog before an ironic ending.

The not-even-really-notable differences between the versions: a male sheriff is now female, the dog has more digital effects and the gore is a little more plentiful. Roth's movie struck an effective chord between gory, unnerving and humorous, and, really, the biggest difference between these two versions is that the remake lacks the fun of the first one. Aside from an utter dearth of originality, blame any chameleons played by bland actors given uninspiring direction for that. Roth putting his name on this cynical cash grab as the producer only damages his reputation as a filmmaker.





OVERLOOKED, FORGOTTEN AND DISMISSED

THIS ISSUE: LANCE GETS RIGHT WITH GOD

008: NUMBER OF THE PRIEST



FLESH FOR THE INFERNO

MVD Visual

I'm not religious—I don't believe in God and I don't believe in any kind of evil entity either... well, except maybe Donald Trump. But ever since watching *The Exorcist* as a kid, I've liked horror films that pit Christian good against satanic evil. In *Flesh for the Inferno*, some kids dressing up as abandoned Catholic school awakens the material spirits of three nuns who were walked-up in the basement by a priest who raped little boys. Director Richard Griffin (*Osco Exorcist*) makes this low-budget flick funny, creepy and bloody as Hell. And the final confrontation with Lucifer made me want to confess my sins, okay?

BODY COUNT: 16

BEST DEATH: Bald guy's last head

CHILD'S PLAY



TORTURE CHAMBER

Shriek Entertainment

It's really creepy when the killer as a movie as a child—and even creepier when it's a group of kids! After being burned horribly in a prank by one of his friends, thirteen-year-old Jimmy is locked up in a juvenile detention center with other sexually-unbalanced, disfigured children who follow him like a deity. One night they escape and go on a killing rampage, exacting revenge on everybody who wronged him. It's up to Jimmy's older brother, who happens to be a Catholic priest, to stop him. Though beautifully shot and boasting an intense, nightmarish score, the movie's flashbacks and dream sequences are confusing. And come on—the kids had an abandoned castle with a fully stocked torture chamber? Oh wait, now I get the title!

BODY COUNT: 9

BEST DEATH: Kid decapitated with a sword

UNHOLY WATER



UPSIDE-DOWN CROSS

Fantasy 2000

Ever tried having sex on a toilet? Not as easy as you might think—and besides, why would you want to? Unfortunately, that's the only thing I took away from this movie about Madeline, a drug-addicted prostitute who goes back to her mother's house to cry out. Her holy roller mother believes she's possessed and hires a priest to exorcise her, but instead of getting the demon out, the perversed preacher tortures and rapes her, culminating in the most awkward toilet sex scene ever captured on film. Directed by William Hellfire (*Morgue Strangler*, *Graveyard Dojo*), who took a six-year hiatus from making movies, this is a boring, amateur affair heavy on dialogue and nudity, and light on story. If you watch it, you'll pity that poor toilet.

BODY COUNT: 0

BEST DEATH: William Hellfire's directional "comeback"

The tagline on the cover art for the 2016 *Cabin Fever* is "You can't run from what's inside." Again, that's true but thinkfully when it comes to this disc, you can leave what's inside right where it is and not infect your Blu-ray player with this crap.

DANE ALEXANDER

STRAIGHT OUTTA CRAMPTON

SUN CHOKE

Starring Sarah Hagen, Barbara Crampton and Sara Miskall Lane
Written and directed by Ben Crescenzo
Uncle Remy

The wages of parental neglect get explored in sad and bloody effect in *Sun Choke*, a Los Angeles-set indie by Ben Crescenzo. It's a movie anchored by strong performances and a filmmaker who trades in both his material and his audience. Honor goes expecting to be spoiled and the story, though, may find Crescenzo's sophomore film too arty to choke down.

Sarah Hagen (*Blade II*, *Empire Stripped*) stars as Jane, an odd young woman recovering from a psychotic break (Jane's mother, we learn early on, is dead). Looking after her as a mysterious caretaker/therapist/lover played by genre favorite Barbara Crampton.

Eventually Jane is allowed to leave the house, and she soon becomes obsessed with Savannah (Sara Miskall Lane). Savannah, a young woman she initially thinks is her doppelgänger, Jane begins stalking Savannah, leading to acts of bloody violence that force her to confront to confront the darkest parts of herself.

The exact nature of Jane's breakdown remains a mystery. Instead writer/director Crescenzo gives hints about her back story via carefully edited flashbacks that

are only half-glimpsed and processed upon initial viewing. What is obvious is that Jane is a deeply lively woman left by a wealthy parent to be raised by the help. She also has little ability to connect with anyone meaningfully.

Hagen is brilliant and fearless as Jane. Involving as she is by Crescenzo's caretaker, the actor can play both



sympathy and awkward self-loathing. Jane's descent into madness is scary thanks to Hagen's willingness to let her character be unlikable. Her co-star Lane, best known for across genre roles in movies by the micro-budget Asylum studio, displays real vulnerability here as the object of Jane's obsession. Meanwhile, Crampton (*The Amityville Horror*, *De-Archived*) is both motherly and sinister as the woman stuck with having to control her unruly and potentially dangerous charge.

Crescenzo peels out bits of narrative shingly but masterfully. Is Jane insane? What really happened to her parents? Who is the caretaker? What role does Jane think Savannah can fill in her? The answers to these questions are unveiled with enough ambiguity to inspire either respect or trepidation, depending on your preference.

SEAN LUMBER

LAST CHANCE LANCE

BLAIR WITCH SCREENWRITER SIMON BARRETT REVEALS HOW THE MAKERS OF THE SURPRISE SEQUEL TO ONE OF THE BIGGEST HORROR FILMS OF ALL TIME KEPT IT A SECRET FOR SO LONG

BACK TO THE BLACK HILLS

DAVE ALEXANDER

THIS PAST JULY AT THE SAN DIEGO COMIC CON, LIONSGATE DROPPED A BOMB: what the trailer it presented for what was supposed to be a film called *The Woods* was actually *Blair Witch*, a sequel to *The Blair Witch Project*. Seventeen years ago the original film, by Eduardo Sanchez and Daniel Myrick, masterfully manipulated audiences into thinking that its "found footage" of three student filmmakers getting lost in the woods and disappearing while investigating a terrifying urban legend was authentic. Lionsgate's bait-and-switch was thrilling in an era where it's nearly impossible to keep a secret about anything.

Not only did the trailer for *Blair Witch*—about the brother of lost filmmaker Heather Donahue, and his concubine, heading back into the Black Hills near Burksville, Maryland, to investigate the legend and find clues about the disappearance—invoke *Blair Witch* chaos, the movie was directed by Adam Wingard and written by Simon Barrett, the team behind respected films *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, *You're Next*, and *The Guest*.

Just before going to print on this issue, we got behind the curtain to fill us in on what early reviews are calling one of the scariest movies ever made.

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR RELATIONSHIP TO THE ORIGINAL FILM?

The Blair Witch Project is a horror masterpiece that I think people are still figuring out. Definitely at the time that I saw it, which was in the summer of 1999, at an art-house multiplex in Waltham, Massachusetts, I'd never seen anything like it, except maybe *Alien*, *Dog or Catman*, or *Requiem*. But *The Blair Witch Project* honestly felt more real than those films, with its brilliant improvisational acting and its glancing hints at a deep mythology. *M*'s subsequent found-footage horror was influenced by it, including the two *KILLS* films I worked on.

WHAT SORT OF THINGS WERE DONE TO ENSURE BLAIR WITCH'S SECRECY?

Once the script reached the stage where we had to show it to people outside of our immediate circle, [I was] to create what we called the "hush draft," in which all of the proper names were different and there were essentially no references to anything even peripherally *Blair Witch* related. For every subsequent review,

I'd create two separate drafts, one safe, one unsafe that was just for us. It honestly drove me a little bit insane. Later, when it came to casting, I created some almost entirely new scenes for actors to audition to. So that was like a double-safe draft. The scenes were kind of bizarre, and I think the actors must have thought they were auditioning for, at best, a *Blair Witch* Project rip-off, but I guess they had faith in Adam and the rest of our team because we ended up with a great cast. Once they signed their deals, we told them what film they were actually in. I think they were pretty relieved.

WHAT ABOUT DURING THE SHOOT?

During production, the only people with actual script pages were the cast and a few of our department heads. Everyone else got the safe draft pages. It actually led to some confusion a couple of times, when we'd find out that our art department was making the wrong sign because they had the wrong draft, but fortunately we were mostly able to make it work.

DOES THIS FILM DISCOUNT RWP II?

Yeah, it does. I made the choice at an early stage that I didn't want to reference anything that wasn't in the original *Blair Witch Project*. I also didn't want to consider anything canon that didn't have the direct creative involvement of the original filmmakers, so that's basically discarded everything except the *Case of the Blair Witch* TV special and [the book] *Blair Witch Dossier*, both of which he happily elucidate all of the legends referenced in the original film.

HOW IS BLAIR WITCH ADDING TO THE MYTHOLOGY?

I definitely added a few things to the established *Blair Witch Project* mythology, and expanded upon other elements, hopefully in ways that fans of the original film will enjoy. I won't say more than that because I don't want to spoil anything.

IF YOU'RE LOST IN THE WOODS AND COME ACROSS AN ABANDONED HOUSE, ARE YOU THE KINDA GUY WHO EXPLORES IT OR HUNS LIKE HELL?

I would totally explore an abandoned house in the woods. In fact, I have. I grew up in red Missouri, so as a kid, such places were kind of where my friends and I would hang out. Most kids were a greater threat to that area than witches. ☠



RETROSPECTIVES



BLACK AND WHITE AND DREAD ALL OVER

CARNIVAL OF SOULS (1962) *Blu-ray*

Starring Candace Hilligoss, Frances Foster
and Sidney Berger
Directed by Herk Harvey
Written by John Clifford
Criterion

Back when you could count Criterion's horror releases on one hand, the *Carnival of Souls* DVD proved that low-budget horror flicks could share shelf space with Bergman and Fellini. And while audiences are now more comfortable with the idea of high-brow horror than even a couple decades ago, the film's long overdue Blu-ray upgrade holds cement *Carnival of Souls'* enduring legacy as an indie shocker with eerie matched atmosphere.

The only dramatic feature by Kansas-based industrial filmmaker Herk Harvey, *Carnival of Souls* follows Mary (Candace Hilligoss), a young church organist who barely escapes when her car swerves off a bridge into a

river. In the days that follow, Mary takes a job in a new town where she's haunted by cadaverous phantasies (yes, the film is a precursor to *Night of the Living Dead*) that congregate in a crumbling seaside fair pavilion. As she deals with the quirky locals, including her nosy landlord (Frances Foster) and a lecherous neighbor (Sidney Berger), Mary keeps slipping into a purgatory-like existence where no one can see or hear her.

What's fascinating about the film is its stark religious overtones. Shot largely in an abandoned amusement park in Utah—the heart of Mormon country—it appears to embody Mary's own spiritual struggle, especially following her confession that “to me a church is just a place of business.” Of course, Mary has good reason to doubt her place in the world and the value of her soul, as revealed in the twist that may no longer come as a total surprise, but still packs a punch.

The story is helped along by arresting black-and-white imagery and groundbreaking sound design that includes Gene Moore's off-kilter organ score. In all, Harvey's sole directorial effort remains an essential horror classic that bridges

the gap between 1950s TV hit *The Twilight Zone* and *Night of the Living Dead* just six years later.

Of course, Criterion's Blu is crammed with extras. Aside from a new 4K restoration, an interview with comedian and genre expert Dana Gould, and an essay by journalist Kier-La Janisse, there are goodies from previous incarnations, including a selected commentary by Harvey (who died in 1996), and screenwriter John Clifford, a documentary on the 1969 cast and crew reunion, a 2000 tour of the film's locations, deleted scenes, outtakes, an isolated score, and more. It's a veritable carnival of extras.

PAUL CORIPE

DOG DAYS OF HAMMER

THE HOUND OF THE BASKERVILLES (1959) *Blu-ray*

Starring Peter Cushing, Christopher Lee and André Morell
Directed by Terence Fisher
Written by Peter Bryant
Twilight Time

Some might be hard-pressed to call *The Hound of the Baskervilles* a horror story, but this genre-bending mystery, newly minted in a limited edition Blu-ray, proves that it's as lovelly

and dark as anything that Hammer Films produced in its heyday. The key creative team (Cushing and Lee, director Fisher and composer James Bernard) also collaborated on *Horror of Dracula* and *The Curse of Frankenstein*, and *Baskervilles* is a perfect fit with those other gothic nerve and atmosphere that Hammer was known for, and which was exploited in the above-mentioned advertising.

The story sees Holmes (Peter Cushing) and Watson (André Morell) summoned to Baskerville Hall to investigate a murder by the voracious hound, purportedly a centuries-old curse for the Baskerville family, and to protect Henry Baskerville (Lee) from a creature that may be the stuff of legend.

Being a Hammer film, there's an emphasis on misty moors, deady quicksand, creepy spiders and murder most foul. Though it's not carried around visceral scenes, the ambience is steeped in spookiness. And while the hound is more of a plot device than anything, Fisher wisely holds back on showing it until necessary. Instead, he gives us its victims' terror-stricken reaction shots, making the canine far more menacing in our imagination.

Cushing channels the same fierce intellect that he brought to his interpretation of Frankenstein,



to the point that *Saskatchewan* really highlights similarities between these two obsessive individuals. But the big surprise here is Morel, who has enough presence to match both Cushing and Lee, and is given a hefty chunk of screen time.

Although at times a bit soft, the HD transfer showcases how lovely the film must have looked upon release: the elaborate sets blossom with colour and shadow, and there's a raggedness to the location work that gives the film an edge. Topping it off, *Twilight Time* has outdone itself with extras, offering two commentary tracks, a 2002 interview with Lee, and Benard's scene in isolation. Hammerheads will want to scratch this one up quickly before all 2000 copies are gone.

JEFF SZPARGLAS

SPLATTER FILM

RETURN OF THE KILLER TOMATOES! (1988) Blu-ray

Starring George Clooney, Anthony Starke and Karen W. Waldron
Directed by John De Bello
Written by Stephen Andrew Aronow Films

When it comes to good old-fashioned silliness, there is a seemingly endless bounty of goofy films from the '80s, with perhaps *Return of the Killer Tomatoes!* at the top of the heap (or bottom?). Taking place over a decade after the *Cool Tomato* War in *Attack of the Killer Tomatoes!* (1978), there's now a strict citywide ban on the seedy meranges, but one mad scientist, Dr Gangreen (the great John Astin from the original *Addams Family*), is working on perfecting his killer tomatoes so they can blend in and look like normal human civilians. Equipped with his army, he would then have them infiltrate the masses for a hostile takeover. Amongst his specimens is Tara (Karen W. Waldron), a babe with enough of a tomato brain to realize she wants nothing to do with his plan and leaves. She soon meets the dorky and lovable Chad (Anthony Starke) – plus his roommate Matt (George Clooney) – and instantly falls for him. Together as man and killer-tomato girlfriend, they fight to save the world from the impending wave of mutant fruit.

As far as sequels to ridiculous films go, they should all follow the trajectory of the *Fast Dead* franchise. When the first movie is already better, the ante must be upped exponentially. *Return* feels so different from *Attack* due to the decade between them, but it works. It's as dumb as humanly possible with schlocky gags every few seconds (such as a repeated misuse of product-placement jokes) and a ultra-thin plot that makes just enough sense to keep an audience, err, rooted, a victory given that so many spoofs have the



tendency to derail into total nonsense.

Return's release features an audio commentary by director John De Bello, in which he mostly discusses the writing process with Stephen Andrew, a teardrunker with star Anthony Starke, who displays a hilarious lack of humility about why *Return* is such a good movie, a TV spot, and a photo gallery. *Return* by no means wants to be anything other than a stupid sequel to a stupid movie, but for those who can appreciate the importance of stupid, it's a brilliant choice.

NICHOLE CHAMROT

LESSER LEE

CIRCUS OF FEAR (1966) Blu-ray

Starring Christopher Lee, Leo Genn and Klaus Kinski
Directed by John Moore
Written by Peter Welbeck
Blue Underground

FIVE GOLDEN DRAGONS (1967)

Starring Robert Cummings, Marla Paxon and Robert O'Neil
Directed by Jeremy Summers
Written by Peter Welbeck
Blue Underground

Throughout the 1960s and early '70s, Christopher Lee was in constant demand – not only by Hammer Films and Amicus Productions, but also by prolific producer/coscreenwriter Harry Alan Towers (credited here as Peter Welbeck), for whom Lee would appear in numerous films. Two

of these productions, *Circus of Fear* and *Five Golden Dragons*, make their Blu-ray debut in a double feature from Blue Underground.

Circus of Fear begins with a daylight heist of an armoured truck on London's Tower Bridge, which leads to the killing of one guard and the loot smuggled away to an empty farmhouse – only to be discovered by someone from the

neighbouring Barbem's Circus. While Police Inspector Elliott (Leo Genn) tries to track down the stolen and the stolen money, which is hidden at the circus, members of the troupe are murdered by an unseen, knife-throwing assailant. With a long list of unsavoury characters, including the circus' head-sporting lion tamer, Gregor (Lee), and a mysterious criminal named Manfred (Klaus Kinski) snooping around, the killer could be anyone.

But while *Circus* is a murder-mystery-thriller hybrid with horror elements, *Five Golden Dragons* is a comedic spy spoof set in Hong Kong that tells of an American, Bob Mitchell (Robert Cummings), who unwittingly gets caught up with the activities of both local gangsters and the heads of an international crime ring – the titular "Golden Dragons" – in town for a secret meeting.

Though Lee takes top billing in *Circus*, he's in more of a supporting role; and in *Dragons*, the icon is reduced to a cameo appearance as one of the crime lords – wearing an absurd-looking gold-coloured dragon mask. Both films were promoted as being based upon stories by prolific mystery and crime author Edgar Wallace, whose output provided the basis for numerous German-licensed "krimi" thrillers in the 1960s. Here, however, the connection to Wallace's work is seemingly marginal, at best.

Extras on this region-free disc include a commentary with *Circus* director John Moore plus trailers and image galleries for both films. The occasionally suspenseful yet tacky *Circus* (which was released in the US as *Psycho-Circus* in a truncated version) has been restored to its original 91 minutes, and is definitely the better of the two films, for Lee fans, anyway.

JAMES BURNELL



Circus of Fear



NOT 'CRAFTY' ENOUGH

LURKING FEAR (1994)

Starring Jon Finch, Blake Bailey and Ashley Laurence
Written and Directed by C. Courtney Joyner
Falls Moon

HP Lovecraft once wrote "Memories and possibilities are ever more hideous than realities." How tempting then for any devotee of the Providence author to repurpose that sentiment when illustrating the difficulties of translating his unending literary works into film. A case in point is *Lurking Fear* leered in Romanes, his loose adaptation of an admittedly lesser story preserves Lovecraft's themes of madness, inbreeding and hereditary degeneration but does nothing particularly remarkable with them.

John Marlane (Blake Bailey), a square-jawed ex-con, returns to his hometown of Lefterts Cove after serving four years in prison for five years as the number eight between voice-over and dialogue. After receiving the other half of a map, he visits the cemetery where his late father stashed the loot from his final heist. As John attempts to lay claim to his "family legacy," he encounters a disparate rabble that includes a gun-toting avenging female (Hellraiser's Ashley Laurence, here curiously billed as "Ashley Laurence"), an alcoholic town doctor (Re-Animator's Jeffrey Combs) and a trio of criminals led by Bennett (Jon Finch), a ruthless Englishman hoping to retrieve the money stolen from him by Marlane's daddy. Complicating matters further are the carnivorous humanoid lurking beneath the cemetery's shadowy, subterranean chambers.

A horror movie draped in the accoutrements of a crime drama, *Lurking Fear* is a curious beast from producer Charles Band. Its moderate scares—which are mostly confined to pale-ajons blundering into frame and clawing at doctish victims—enliven proceedings somewhat but fail

to shore up the film's uneven structure. Instead, an adequate cast is tasked with filling out the sketchily developed supporting roles, wrapping their tongues around such unpolished gems of dialogue as "I think getting out of here is an excellent fucking prospect." Only Finch, whose prodigious talent was left largely unfulfilled by the time of his death in 2012, rises to the occasion, offering an agreeably oily parody of a displaced London gangster.

Digitally remastered from the original 35mm camera negative and featuring a generous assortment of extras, *Lurking Fear* is certainly not without its diverting pleasures (the Morlock-like manstrodes are terrific). However, one is left to ponder what Stuart Gordon and Dennis Paoli might have accomplished with this material.

MICHAEL DOYLE



LUNAR CY

BAD MOON (1996) Blu-ray

Starring Marel Hemingway, Michael Pare and Alison Gembel
Written and directed by Eric Red
Screen Factory

Is it possible to review a film called *Bad Moon* that's re-released as a special edition Blu-ray and not write, "There's a *Bad Moon* on the rise?" Guess not.

Okay, now that that's out of the air system, let's take a closer look at Eric Red's largely forgotten mid-'90s werewolf flick. Whiles/director Red—who wrote *The Hitcher*, co-wrote *Near Dark*, and wrote and directed *Body Parts*—took a swipe at a creature feature heavy on kites, puppets and animatronics, but, released the same year as *Screen*, was a little late to the lycan par-

ty. Coming way after the likes of *An American Werewolf in London*, *The Howling*, *Silver Bullet* and *Wolfen*, it has little to add to the werewolf canon, other than some grainy gore, which is more prevalent in the director's cut included on Screen Factory's special edition.

Michael Pare (*The Philadelphia Experiment*, *Bloodrayne*, *Bone Tomahawk*) sort-of stars (more on that shortly) as Ted, a photojournalist who's attacked by a werewolf in Rome and then becomes one of the creatures himself. We all know the exact trajectory of our tortured soul, which is one of the film's problems, as the audience waits for the characters to catch up to the plot trajectory. Once back stateside, Ted re-connects with his lawyer sister Janet (miscast Marel Hemingway) and her prison son, Brett (Mason Gamble), and picks his Andalusian trailer in their wooded backyard. Those woods are key, because it's where Ted goes to headbutt himself to a tree when he waits out under the full moon—which seems to be every single night, oddly.

Things get complicated because of Thor No, not the God of Thunder, but Janet and Brett's German shepherd, who's really the protagonist of *Bad Moon*. Red adapted the screenplay from a book called *Thor* (by Wayne Smith), and it's the canines who most ultimately fight off his now-horse yordems.

While the gore and werewolf effects are sometimes pretty dope (minus a bombly executed early digital effect that's mostly gone from the director's cut), the characters are flat, the plot is readsores and some of it is just plain awkward,

including a scene where Ted is giving his nephew a neck massage. (Perhaps he's just tenderizing the lad for later?)

Screen Factory offers a rather stiff commentary with Red, a decent making-of doc and a VHS-sourced longer intro featuring an even sillier version of the rolling tent sex scene. Also, this *Moon* contains more than twice amounts of cheese.

DAVE ALEXANDER



THE LATE-NITE ARCHIVE

FILMS *Fish Out Of Water*

by Paul Corio

When legions of monster kids and nostalgic adults tuning in to TV reruns of Universal's classic chillers in the late 1950s, poverty row producers were quick to exploit the craze with a headful of cash-stripped imitations. While films such as *The Mummy* (1956), *Phantom's Curse* (1957), *The Return of Dracula* (1958) and *Frankenstein's Daughter* (1958) tempered their horror content to embrace more popular sci-fi elements, *The Monster of Piedras Blancas* (1959) closely followed the waterlogged footsteps of *The Creature From the Black Lagoon* (1954), even as it helped push on-screen bloodshed in exciting new directions. The film hasn't been released since the VHS days, and *Globe Video's* new Blu-ray promises a second chance to see this once-obscure creature feature in all its gory glory.

Largely shot on location in Southern California, it follows a rash of mysterious murders—in a small fishing community—in which bodies are found decapitated and drenched in blood. There's a local legend about some sort of prehistoric humanoid killer that lives in the coastal caves out by the creepy lighthouse that *Stranges* (John Hennessey) inhabits with his teenage daughter Lucy (Jewane Centeno). But as more headless victims pile up, Lucy's mamma biologist boyfriend Fred (The *Gun* Guy Moustache's Don Sullivan) suspects that her poor dad has a part in this killing spree that has gripped the town.

Touted as the winner of *Monsters of Piedras Blancas*'s "Stock Award"—as apparently ghoulish accolades cooked up as a promotional gimmick—in *The Monster of Piedras Blancas* is nevertheless a fine addition to the knock-off monster film fad of the late 1950s. Hitting theaters alongside Hammer Studios' colorful (and actually authorized) Universal remakes, these films may not have costed the production values to compete with studio pictures, but they provided a decent serving of drive-in thrills.

Unlike many of its peers, *The Monster of Piedras Blancas* was at least made by industry professionals, in this case a group of technicians recently



laid off from Universal. Collaborating with director Irvin Berwick and writer H. Hinkle Chase, producer Jack Koenig had evoked on the original design of the Gill-Man just five years earlier, and used his connections at the studio to access needed equipment, including familiar models used for the re-

spectably impressive *monster suit*. But where the film really sets itself apart is as a willingness to splash around a little blood, concocting a tale that surely inspired more than a few nightmares for its young audience.

Much like *The Mummy* and *The Return of Dracula*, the early kills in *The Monster of Piedras Blancas* occur off-camera, with characters only discovering the strange letter "M" (Never sees anything like it, as my 11th, head's ripped clean off)" enforces one last). Even the monster is barely suggested—he's simply a shadow on a wall, or a glimpsed scaly claw. But in the last few reels, Berwick and Koenig do something almost unheard of at the time by actually delivering on the promise of graphic twists and violence. Following the monster's murder of a young girl—her father carries

her through town in an obvious nod to *Frankenstein*—the audience finally gets a good look at the monster as he appears holding a severed prop head of a missing police officer, decorated with streaks of blood and even viscera hanging from the torn flesh around the neck.

While easily trumped by gore pioneer H.G. Lewis just a few years later, this scene is still shocking because it's so different from many of the films of the time. It's also a far cry from the other decapitation movies such as *The Reel* (1958) or *The Thing That Couldn't Die* (1959), which feature heads that continue to exhibit signs of life even without their bodies attached. In this case, however, beheading is presented as a grisly, final act, the finality of which is driven home in a later scene in the monster's cave, where a crab is shown crawling around the officer's decapitated noggin.

As a cheap Universal copycat, no one would call *The Monster of Piedras Blancas* as a gore classic, but its shift from simply discussing violent death to showing its gruesomeness afterwards certainly helped the green creep closer to the bloody box office successes of the 1960s. Even though it has been largely forgotten over the years, it's great positive that real change doesn't happen overnight—for every landmark horror movie that pushes the envelope, a bunch of smaller films were likely there first to test the waters.



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IT CAME FROM BOWEN'S BASEMENT



DRIVE-INS, DELETE BINS AND OTHER SINS

Writer Bites Shark by John W. Bowen

Jaws is sucking everyone. The sequels aren't, but they make for a pretty compelling case study in diminishing cinematic returns. In *Jaws 2* we have a film as tacky and charmless as one would expect any Hollywood blockbuster product to be, and it packs none of the sentimental glories and grain of its successor, the inept *Jaws 3-D*. But of the bunch, only *Jaws: The Revenge* (out now on Blu-ray from Universal, along with the other sequels) can plumb the heavy depths of such speculatively shiny nature-run-amok anti-classics as *The Swimmer* and *Orca*.

Orcaise, Anisyl Island, eight-before-the-night-before-Christmas, 1987: after some good-natured authority ball-busting over the shore with his older sibling Mike (Lance Guest), Deputy Sean Brody (Mitchell Anderson) — son of Police Chief Martin Brody, who's now very conveniently dead — gets brutally chewed by a big ol' Carcharodon while leaning over the gunwale of a police boat. End of Sean, and of progeny.

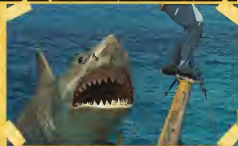
Great-shark franchise multi-arch Ellen Brody (Laurie Garry, the only cast member from the original) is convinced this particular shark wasn't just out for a snack; it had a score to settle. That's right, this time it's—guessed, I can't even type that with a straight face.

"It started all this time and it came for him," Ellen greenwashes to her surviving son, concededly a marine biologist. "I don't want anyone in my family anywhere near the water. Never again! It killed Sean. It killed your brother."

"Did one of them attack, Mike counters, but Ma's got that sh!t figured too."

"He died from fear! The fear of it killed him!" Now, with the hairs for both logic and dialogue soundly in place, we can get on with Act Two.

Ellen initially declines Mike's invitation to come down to his place in the Bahamas for Christmas



and ride out her grief with him and his family, but she's soon talked into it by the inextinguishable Adorably Phobicous Granddaughter — yeah, you know, the kid you just want to punch. Off they jet, with of Betsy McChemp in hot pursuit. So then they... hey, wait, you're telling me this fish that kills Sean off the coast of Massachusetts on December 23 swims

fast enough to make it to the Bahamas by Boxing Day? I call shark-nings! And besides, why would it follow them? Well, apparently it. Ellen was right about sharks being notorious grudge-holders, and if sharks are also psychic, so it knows exactly where the Brody bunch are hiding. (After under Staff They Never Mourn on the Discovery Channel.)

Upon landing we meet the remaining supporting players: Mike's business partner Jake (Mario Van Peebles, who keeps telling in and out of his Caribbean accent so frequently you'll think he's play-

ing two roles) and local pistol-whispering reggae Hoagie (Michael Caine, who apparently took a wrong turn while searching for his dignity after *The Swimmer* and wound up here: poor roo). Then Mike and Jake have their own close call with the shark, so what do they do? Swear each other to secrecy to keep the local fishermen from making everything. Seriously

(Scribbled in the notes I was making while watching: "H and I decide not to report giant-ess shark in area frequented by bathers. That's responsible. Cuts.") Jake also cleverly makes "clunk-clunk" shark music scores, because we didn't really need that fourth wall anyway. Then Mom swipes a heavy sailboat and goes out after the shark completely unarmed — to do what, exactly? Give it a stern lecture and a swift kick in the ha?

"I had to do it," she protests later when Mike questions her judgement. "There was nothing else to do!" Granted, she did it while having flashbacks to her husband blowing up the shark tank in '73, even though it she wasn't present when that happened and by said up-blowing would also preclude the shark from, you know, still being alive. Oh, and in the midst of it all she finds herself falling in love with Hoagie. Well, it's late. Pack bags. Let's move on.

Be running out of space here, so let's quickly appraise the punchy effects. The like-ess shark is as rigid as a Winebago, with a mouth that hangs perpetually open like it's auditioning for a summer stock production of *Myosotis Dyonisus*. But hey, at least it doesn't roar like the one in the previous film. Well, not until the very end, anyway. Wonder? None of those sequels are even halfway worthy successors, but *Jaws: The Revenge* is truly a hecker's holiday, which is sort of an endorsement around here. Now snore, you connoisseur, and get the hell out of my basement. ☹



BLOOD IN FOUR COLOURS

by PEDRO CABREJALO

I've written a lot about how current indie comic creators are benefitting from self-publishing and digital distribution. Despite the many challenges facing the industry, there are now greater opportunities to get your work in front of an audience than ever before.

That said, it's not an easy task to see those avenues to produce a long-running successful book, much less launch an entire publishing label. However, that's exactly what Altera Comics has done.

Established in 2006 by creator/self-publisher Peter Smeth, Altera was created to give talented writers and artists a vehicle to tell tales their way. Smeth never intended it to become a company; it was more a spur-of-the-moment branding decision he made for one of his own comics. However, he soon found himself inundated with submissions from writers and artists believing Altera to be an established publisher.

Eventually Smeth decided to formally establish the imprint, not imagining the successes that would come as the company produced some of the most exciting creator-owned comics on the market.

Many of these releases are showcased in the Altera Anniversary, an anthology celebrating the company's first ten years with samples from its books.

"It's a massive collection of some of the best stories from about 40 different Altera Comics titles," boasts Smeth. "It's well over 400 pages – it's like a telephone book of comics – and I guarantee that you'll want to seek out at least half of the stories once you're done."

Though not all of the titles in this compilation are horror-themed, the genre is well-represented. There are books dealing with zombies (*Master Russia*, *The Black Hand*), werewolves (*Mothers of Summer*, *Reign of the Wolf*), demons (*Bliss*, *The Delirious Secretariat*), Satanists (*Satanic Hell*), serial killers (*Blue String*, *Clay of the Black Widow*) and more obscure phenomena (*Clash@Rink*, *Uet 44*).

Despite their prevalence in the anthology and the company's catalogue, it was never Smeth's plan to fill Altera's roster with the monstrosities

and the supernatural. Rather, this was simply what creators were bringing to him.

"I've always been a horror fan but this wasn't a deliberate choice," he admits. "I think horror tends to offer a really large variety of storytelling angles so that's probably why the majority of our books have horror themes to them, even if it's not a straight-up monster book."

Smeth speaks from experience as the writer and creator of one of Altera's most successful – and gruesome – graphic novels, *The Chair*. Set on death row, the book tells the story of Richard Sullivan, a mass murderer who claims he's innocent, yet must confront the horrors of his impending execution as well as the repulsive tortures of the inmate wardens.

Brutally violent and unflinching, with art by Kevin Christensen, *The Chair* pulls no punches when it comes to its depictions of physical and mental abuse, offering up plenty of gore and disturbing subject matter (gaping rape, etc.). The many horrors lead to an unexpected, yet satisfying, twist ending that would be at home in a Rod Serling production.

"*The Chair* is a psychological horror story about the powerful versus the powerless," says Smeth. "Though it was created in 2008, it's still very much relevant as there are themes of abuse of power, the criminal justice system, mental health and nature vs. nurture."

The title struck a chord, and a film version is currently in production, scheduled for release next year. Smeth promises it will be as raw and visceral as the source material and will further explore the themes in the graphic novel's unrelenting cold closes: *Roddy Piper* (in one of his last roles), *Bill Obant Jr.* (*Clay of the Dead*), *Neema Grossman* (*American Horror Story*), *Zach Galligan* (*Gremlins*), *Noah Hathaway* (*Neverending Story*), *Eiza Guzman* (*The 100*)



The Chair: One of Altera Comics' most popular titles

Have Eyes) and *Tim Minkoff* (*Deadpool*).

Smeth is currently working on making the company's offerings even more accessible. Though most of Altera's catalogue is available on digital platforms such as Comixology, he's hoping to get more print versions into comic and bookstores around the world. But regardless of how you decide to read the finished product, Smeth thinks horror fans will find much to love.

"The books are awesome and innovative for starters!" he proclaims. "Altera titles are all creator-owned, so they're all unique tales, that aren't controlled by an editorial process or held back by decades of continuity. Every story at Altera presents a different world, an alternate reality that you can wait for as long or as little as you'd like."

FOLLOW PEDRO ON TWITTER @PCABREJALO

Lance Bankman can't seem to hold down a job. That could be because all of his bosses turn out to be evil masterminds determined to take over the world — usually with some molotsoff help. That's the skewer pitch for *Freelance Blues*, a book that succeeds thanks to its clever sense of humor and the ingenious methods employed by the aforementioned diabolical masterminds. For example, the owner of K&N Consumer Contracting is channeling the anger of phone survey recipients to summon the dark goddess K&N to Earth. Similarly, a mad scientist at a bio-research clinic is using the blood from peace-loving vampires to create an army of super-humans. Despite the many tongue-in-cheek elements, it's all grounded in its sincere depiction of Lance as a young man torn between tawdry obligations and the chaotic world he finds himself in. It's a quest of self-discovery that captures the reader's attention as much as the murder mayhem.



It's never too early to introduce little creatures to the things that go bump in the night. *Lilith Dark & the Beasts Tree* is a nice addition to the ranks of all-ages horror comics, as little Lilith bravely goes up against



evil dogs, flesh-eating Caraculles, transforming werewolves, and plain, old-fashioned beasts. Lilith herself is a scrappy troublemaker who is eager to take on the dreaded dark by herself, or with the help of her dog Kirby, her new monster friend Spook, and her pet T-Rex. There are no moral or life lessons on display here, just pure, unadulterated kid-friendly fun, made more palatable by some very sleek art. Though it teeters on being too cutesy, it never quite tips over the saccharine edge, making it genuinely enjoyable for all ages.

Corktown presents an interesting twist on the vampire story after telling victim to a bloodsucker's fatal bite. Detroit detective Tonia finds her soul trapped in limbo, leaving her an intangible spirit who walks the Earth watching helplessly as her reanimated corpse wreaks havoc on the city. Tonia nevertheless is able to possess other people's bodies for a time, and she hopes to use this ability to help her ex-partner solve not only her own murder, but also discover the source of the

vampire curse. Writer Mario Condellano opens the story after Tonia's murder, so the reader is immediately plunged into her nightmare, with the necessary exposition provided by her witnessing the murder of an innocent man at the fangs of her bloodsucking corpse. This allows the story to hit the ground running, and it also provides the necessary air of mystery, as Tonia's own murder remains unseen for now. An intriguing and effective start to the series.



The first issue of *The Dark* deals with the legend of the Boo Witch, or Boo Hag, an evil being known for sucking the breath out of her victims or, in extreme cases, skinning the person and wearing the hide as a disguise. Steve Rankin, a writer researching local myths in Fauke, Arkansas, thinks local Karl Cooper is leading him into the woods to explore the legendary Beast of Boggy Creek. Instead, Rankin becomes a first-hand expert on the Boo Witch, though it's an experience he may live to regret. Written



and drawn by Kelly Williams, it's a brisk tale at only eight pages, yet Williams' charcoal pencils and the story's sudden gut-punching climax prove you don't need to draw out the narrative in order for it to be effective.

Spring Heeled Jack comes to a close with the fourth issue, though there are several clues peppered throughout the story that indicate there's more to come. Believing they've ascertained his true identity, inspectors Doyle and Bell lay a final trap for the serial killer in the London underground. But Jack still has a few surprises up his sleeve, not the least of which is claiming to know the policeman's future.

Initially appearing as a simple Jack the Ripper-type story, the book has had its share of twists and turns, evolving into a fairly original monster tale. The narrative surprises are somewhat let down by the art, however. Though effective in its depictions of Jack himself, some of the action sequences are rough and fail to convey the suspense and tension the writer is undoubtedly trying to get across. Regardless, it's worth checking out, especially if you're a Ripper fan.



NINTH CIRCLE BOOKS

DEATH BY UMBRELLA! THE 100 WEIRDEST HORROR MOVIE WEAPONS

Christopher Lombardo and Jeff Kirschner
BoxOfRoses Media

There's something about the horror genre that just begs to be itemized, sorted and listed. Perhaps it's because many hardcore fans, such as *Death by Umbrella!* authors Christopher Lombardo and Jeff Kirschner, have a knack for retaining a near-encyclopedic knowledge of the movies they love, or well as a compulsion to organize that knowledge into a handy-dandy reference book. But what separates *Death by Umbrella!* from your run-of-the-mill glossary is the amount of heart and appreciation within its pages. Following the book's foreword by *Troma's* celebrated founder Lloyd Kaufman are a series of detailed descriptions of unforgettable moments in horror movies, articulated with as much sincerity and affection as if the authors were recounting their own favourite high school memories.

Divided into chapters that categorize their contents (such as Deadly Machinery, Kitchen Nightmares, and Sports And Recreation), *Death by Umbrella!* not only reminisces on our favourite

instruments of bloody murder, it also ranks them from 100 and situates them within context of horror trends and mores. At a compact yet robust 171 pages, the book covers everything from vacuum cleaners (*Dead Meat*) to cars of corn (*Sleepwalkers*) and all the odds and ends in between, with each object of reverence presented with a detailed description of the scene and the occasional footnote ("honorable mentions") if the item has appeared in multiple movies.

If the authors' names sound familiar, it's because Lombardo and Kirschner host their horror chaps with *Really Awful Movies*, a B-movie podcast they've hosted as a duo since 2014. *Death by Umbrella!* certainly demonstrates their wealth of genre knowledge, but it's more than a mere laundry list of horror movie weaponry,

the conversational tone of the entries makes the book read less like an encyclopedia and more like a pleasant stroll down memory lane with your horror-lover buddies. It's essentially the literary equivalent of a YouTube montage of best kill scenes. Recommended for gorehounds, hot-lovers and trivia fiends.

ANDREA SUBERGATTI

MORBID CURIOSITIES: COLLECTIONS OF THE UNCOMMON AND THE BIZARRE

Paul Gambino
Lawrence King Publishing

What drives us to collect? More specifically, what drives us to collect weird and morbid items? That's the question at the heart of Paul Gambino's new full-colour *Morbid Curiosities* book.

In his introduction, he summarizes some of what he learned from speaking to the eighteen collectors spotlighted within, noting that while each person has his or her own reason for acquiring the objects they do, certain explanations come up time and again. Among them, that collecting morbid objects is a way to gain a bit of control over the frightening concept of death, and in the case of those who collect serial killer items, Gambino believes that it's these peoples' "innate kindness that has made them so fascinated by these 'monsters' and that perhaps there is a subconscious need within them to understand what makes someone evil. The one thing all collectors have in common, he concludes, is a fervent passion for history.

These theories are borne out in the profiles that follow. Each begins with a short bio of the featured collector and an embedded interview (none are longer than two pages). Some of the names you may recognize, tabcoast Paul Booth has been featured in these pages before and Ryan Matthew Cohn (who collects "rare medical, scientific, and anthropology related antiquities") was a regular on the TV show *Goldfish*. Others are gallery and bookstore owners, while some choose to keep a much lower profile, refusing

to be interviewed under their full/fake names. The collections in the book are similarly diverse, featuring skulls, bones and skeletons, old medical equipment and anatomical models, dismembered animals (both real and fake), sideshow signage, serial killer art and letters, and Dado boards and placards.

The profile blurbs, while wonderfully candid about the collectors' experiences and people's reactions to their unusual hobby, often feel too brief, but the pages upon pages of images make up for the scarcity of text. All of the items in *Morbid Curiosities* have been meticulously arranged, displayed and photographed, and each boasts a detailed outline description.

In short, this book could have been twice the size and just as captivating. If you've ever wanted a peek inside the weird world of morbid collecting, this is a perfect introduction. Just be warned, it will leave you wanting more – and possibly even inspired to start a strange collection of your own.

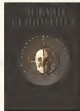
MONICA S. REUBER

ITALIAN HORROR CINEMA

Stefano Baccarelli and Rocco Hunter, eds.
Dundee University Press

"Spaghetti horror" has always been popular with fans, what with all the gothic slayery, gals in slathers, murderous witches, gut-munching cannibals and eye-gouging zombies. As such, it has merited numerous overviews of its sub-genre and directors prominent enough to be recognized by last name alone (Bava, Argento, Fedei, Sili). *Italian Horror Cinema* bills itself as "the first book-length academic investigation of Italian horror cinema, from the silent era to the present."

Indeed, it covers a lot of fertile ground in its 220 pages, from early Italian "horror" cinema (such as silent adaptations of Dante's *Inferno* and Goethe's *Frankenstein*) through the cinema of imitator in the 1960s (unofficial "sequels" and rip-offs) and the weak 21st-century representatives of off-budget horror, which are contrasted with lavish "Italianate" horrors such as *Amer* (2009). The book is very informative regarding certain aspects





Dario Argento's *Deep Red*



animal cruelty in cannibal flicks, with its moral quandaries and aesthetic justifications.

Sadly, the essays devoted to Italy's greatest horror auteurs leave a lot to be desired. "The Making of Mario Bava as Italian horror auteur" seems pointless in its attempt to relativize Bava's status by reminding the reader of his many gun-for-hire works, while the two essays on Argento are cluttered with tangy writing and rather forceful attempts to say something original, even if it is quite irrelevant.

Overall, the book leans more towards the production aspects of Italian horror cinema, while the aesthetic ones are somewhat sidetracked or, even worse, questionably treated. Still, there is more good than bad between these covers and this collection offers enough new insights and information to be worthy of your time.

DEAN O'NEILL

BLOOD WEDDING

Pheme Lemaire
MidHouse Press

Forgetting the occasional thing is par for the course when you're a busy person. Your keys, your mom's birthday, that coffee meeting that was supposed to take place last week but keeps getting rescheduled... it happens. But for *Blood Wedding's* main character Sophie Dugart, her lapses in memory are a little more concerning — she's accidentally shoplifting, she's forgetting whole days and conversations, and this series of missed moments is starting to weigh heavy on her. Things become especially bad when she wakes up one day to discover that Leo, the child she's been caring for, has been murdered and she has no idea if she is the culprit. From there, author Pheme Lemaire looks into a lean, fast-paced web of action and mayhem, which one can easily picture adapted for the big screen as a Bourne-meets-horror popcorn flick.

Although her skill for writing high-intensity plot twists is undeniable, there's some-

DANTE'S PICK



IN THE MOUNTAINS OF MADNESS:
THE LIFE AND EXTRAORDINARY AFTERLIFE OF
H.P. LOVECRAFT

W. Scott Poole
Soft Skull Press

We know the narrative by heart: Howard Phillips Lovecraft wrote cosmic terror tales inspired by his wild imagination, solitary walks, and occasional nervous breakdowns. He struggled financially and received little credit in his lifetime, but he's celebrated today through frequent reprints and the sale of Cthulhu bobbleheads. Sure, he was racist, but that was almost a century ago, a "product of his time," poor defenseless Lovecraft was replaced by Octavia Butler earlier this year as face of the World Fantasy Awards, etc.

W. Scott Poole's *In the Mountains of Madness: The Life and Extraordinary Afterlife of H.P. Lovecraft* is a critical overview of Lovecraft's work and why it endures. It also contains enough biographical information and historical context to cut through the bullshit. Madmen reminds readers that the author fed into his beliefs even after anthropologist Franz von Kuhn noted while examining Lovecraft's work: "Of course, the legendary monster scribe was not alone in his views, but that doesn't make his fervent racism or violent sympathies mainstream."

Poole makes a case for why Lovecraft's work remains the prejudice that only H.P. Lovecraft's characters, with protagonists starkly less racist, make us uncomfortable to read. The *Mountains of Madness* is a collection of essays all concerned with race or racism, whether a strange liturgy of equality. We "are all the same," Cthulhu, and nothing we're, Poole deserves.

Madness also explores the fascinating, long-ignored sexual elements of Lovecraft. "Grandpa Cthulhu" (as the author referred to himself in later years) remains sexually ambiguous, but the undeniable perversion of "The Dunwich Horror" and the fascinating gender-bending "The Thing at the Doorstep" link him to Stuart Gordon more closely than ever before. Gordon's *Redneck* adaptations, which once seemed an odd fit, now feel almost inevitable.

Poole never once dwells on the gory details about one of the most influential voices in horror. Both the things that under him to us and those that repulse us are presented fully and without apology. This is the most thoughtful take on Lovecraft's that's ever seen print.

ADAM CLARKE



A HORROR FAIRY TALE FOR ADULTS, *LILY* PITS SUPERNATURAL POWERS AGAINST PIOUS EVIL

A Touch of Death

by MICHAEL S. KUEBLER



FANTASY ISN'T ALWAYS WITH HORROR IMAGERY. MANY WRITERS, MURDERERS, CANNIBALS, MONSTERS, AND WHORES STRIKE TO GET THEIR SEXUAL AND

young protagonists. Michael Thomas Ford's *Lily* fits this tradition perfectly — except it's for adults.

"When I was a kid, my family had a set of encyclopedias, *The Book of Knowledge*, and each volume had a section of myths and fairy tales," Ford says. "I read those over and over and over. When I started reading books, I read every collection of fairy tales I could get my hands on. The initial appeal was reading about other worlds that, unlike mine, were filled with strangeness and magic and adventure. Once I realized that these stories were also ways to talk about things that we were afraid to talk about openly — we can't talk about children and sexuality, so let's write a story about a witch and a girl in a red cape — I was absolutely fascinated with the way stories and words could be used to both hide and reveal the truth."

And indeed, *Lily* (out October 5 from Little Press) functions on that level. Ford is quick to acknowledge that he wanted to "create a kind of modern fairy tale that addresses contemporary issues about religion," but don't take that to mean he's heavy-handed in his approach. *Lily* is first and foremost a dark, fantastical and, at times, chilling story that draws many of its influences from European folklore.

The tale concerns titular character Lily who, on her thirteenth birthday, develops an unwanted talent. If anyone touches her, she sees in graphic detail how they will die. Her abilities scare the townsfolk and, after her father's death, her mother takes her away from the village. It's on that trip that Lily and her mom stumble upon the Reverend. Everyone and his bath-tubing brother has heard of the Reverend and his "cure" for her of her curse. The Reverend sees Lily as a witch now.

"I wanted to write a book about the way religion, specifically Christianity,

often treats queerness/otherness, as well as the way it treats children, particularly female children. When it comes to sexuality and independence," Ford explains. "To do that, I needed Lily to have something different about her, but I also wanted it to be something that wasn't necessarily obvious to most people. ... I wanted it to be something that made her fearful of getting close to anyone, because that's how so many of us who feel like outsiders react to being different from the people around us. Not being able to touch anyone because you're terrified of knowing how they'll die seemed a very primal fear. It wasn't until I was deep into the book that I also realized that in some ways I was writing about how those of us who come of age during the AIDS crisis felt."

Throughout Lily's journey (which is accompanied by illustrations by artist Steven Andersen, see above), she's followed by Baba Yaga: a disturbing, cannibalistic, grandmotherly figure from Slavic folklore, who not only influences the girl's tale but also acts as another window through which to examine religion.

"She's perfect for this story because to me, she represents an ancient pagan force that existed long before the Christian God showed up and showed his way in. So she can comment on that in ways that are both funny and, I hope, thoughtful."

Since *Lily* is a fairy tale, one could take any number of lessons away from it beyond the obvious ones about the corruption of organized religion; it seems odd if there was any particular moral Ford was trying to get across.

"I'm tempted to quote Baba here, when she tells another character that the moral of a particular story is, 'Even when you are cunning and brave, you can't always succeed because life is hard and often unfair,'" he says. "That's not really it, though. As much as I love darkness, I also believe in hope. Lily's story is about finding strength and love where you least expect it. And given the book's larger theme of religion and how it can be used to destroy people, the message is that those of us who have been broken down by people using religion as a weapon can, and do, survive. Usually with scars and a lot of weird stories." ■





thing to be said for his ability to flesh out realistic characters. In a novel that places so much focus on what's around the corner, it feels as though there's not enough time spent developing Sophie. Instead, importance is placed on the things that happen to her. After reading this novel, it would be hard to describe the character in any words other than "lecherous" and "obsessed." Furthermore, there are a multitude of instances of sexual violence enacted on her that don't work, as though Lemaitre is simply trying to be transgressive and push boundaries with the female body. While there's no deny-

ing that people have been attacked by toxins they know well, at a certain point *Blood Wedding* makes it seem as though every man is a rapist. It's clunky, especially since everything else in the plotting is so light.

The book is a good choice for those looking for something easy to burn through, but as far as stories with staying power go, *Blood Wedding* isn't going to be celebrated a lot of anniversaries.

NICHELLE CHARRON

LIQUID DIET & MIDNIGHT SNACK

Michael McCarty
Creative Director

The subtitle to Michael McCarty's new book is "2 Vampire Solaires." I think he needs to consult a dictionary. The subtitle should read "2 Vampire Rip-Offs," as there is hardly anything original or interesting at either of these bloodsucking stories, and the small bits that start off intriguing never amount to much.

Both tales feature vampire Andrew Blood-sworth (yes, that was his human name) too telling his life story to an interviewer. Sound familiar? *Liquid Diet* has him talking to a late-night goth radio host named Bella Oona, who gets drawn into his story. The best part of this entry is that the interview ends two-thirds of the way through and Andrew is asked to appear on a talk show with Bella, his still-living vampire friends and a group called OTTO (Opposition to the Oozies) that wants to destroy all vampires. But what could have been a remarkable climax just fades out.

Midnight Snack is even less interesting, focusing on another interview with Andrew about the aftermath of the talk show from the previous story and how a vampire from the past is trying to kill him and his clan. This time he's conversing with an annoying fan who wants to make his big break into journalism by interviewing his idol. Once again, the plot is disappointing.

However, the worst crime this book commits is its abuse of vampire puns, some of which are so groan-worthy you'll find yourself staring at the page in disbelief. Vampires say one on almost every page — made worse by the fact that they often follow them up with "no pun intended." I can't know if McCarty is trying to be up-morally funny or just mildly clever, but he's failed at both.

While there's a lot to rag on in these stories, there are some good moments too, among them a cool idea involving vampires being able to teleport through mirrors, which at one point causes two characters to switch souls. The problem is that all those intriguing concepts are never fleshed out. They end up being sidelined in favor of rehashing Anne Rice's vampire yarns. The world has enough bad vampire fiction already, thanks.

BRETT MICHELL



LIBRARY OF DAMNED

ON A HEAVEN FULL OF GHOSTS

Despite the increasing secularization of society, possession and exorcism yarns are experiencing a notable resurgence. Among them, Paul Tremblay's *A Head Full of Ghosts* (published by William Morrow), which won the Stoker Award for Superior Achievement in a Novel in May. The book concerns the possession of 16-year-old Maxine Barrett, as told by her sister Merry who was right when the incident occurred. The story unfolds heavily in memories clouded by the passage of time, with the past additionally obscured by the hit reality show *The Possession*, which was made about the family. It's through these skewed viewpoints that the reader observes Maxine and her family spiral deeper into insanity (though it's entirely possible that the teenager is simply mentally ill). Tremblay doesn't give his audience any answers, instead delivering a pair of late-game soul-gaming revelations that stick with you as much as the "was she or wasn't she?" debate. So, I decided to ask him a few questions of my own.



WHY AN EXORCISM NOVEL?

In February of 2013 I happened to read a collection of essays — published by Centipede Press — on the film *The Exorcist*. While reading the essays it occurred to me that while Hollywood continues to pump out the PG-13, cheap and easy possession films, there haven't been many recent novels dealing with the subject, at least, none that I was aware of. . . So I started thinking about how I would write a possession story, and I knew right away that I'd want to take a postmodern and secular/skeptical approach that didn't shy away from comparisons to *The Exorcist*.

WHAT MADE YOU INCORPORATE THE REALITY TV ELEMENT?

In an attempt to treat Maxine's plight as realistically as possible in the 21st century, I thought that social media or media in general would most certainly find a way to intrude upon her and her family. The reality show afforded me a great opportunity to further muddy the waters of what was real and what wasn't real too. I tried to build as much ambiguity into the novel as possible, rational or supernatural, possessed or psychotic break, real or scripted, and have it all jumbled up in Merry's unreliable narrative.

IT'S TYPICALLY FEMALES WHO BECOME POSSESSED IN EXORCISM NARRATIVES. WHY?

Merry, a person smarter and more qualified than I have pointed out how conservative a story *The Exorcist* is: religious white man saving the pristine young girl on the verge of puberty from the clutches of an evil demon. The simplistic notion of good versus evil and the added voyeurism and prurience of the girl in peril have had undeniable, long-lasting appeal to horror audiences. There's certainly comfort to be had in the good vs. evil part, though that underlines horror, I think. The best horror is always a transgression and not a return to the status quo at the end. Part of the reason I wrote the book and chose the characters to be who they were was to explore the ritual of misogyny in horror, pop culture and mainstream religion.

BRIGIDA S. KOTLER

THE FRIGHT GALLERY

BY GARY PULLIN

THIS MONTH: THE ART OF GHOST

Many artists' careers have been made by creating artwork for music. For example, UK's Pushover shaped Metallica's aesthetic for years and Derek Riggs' record cover illustrations of Iron Maiden's mascot Eddie have captivated listeners as much as the band's music ever did. Thanks to painter Ed Repka, I can't listen to Megadeth without imagining Vic Rattlehead's shirt-eating grin as he looms over a post-apocalyptic wasteland, and guitarist Adam Jones team Tool, along with artist Chet Zar, has created unforgettable animations, paintings and enough fucked-up imagery for that band to send a kid to the psych ward. Metallica has also created a world with its brand and the talents of dark artists Paul Romano and the cryptical Skinner, who came out a psychedelic, Lovecraftian image.

Swedish heavy metal band Ghost, however, continues to shroud itself in mystery. The band members not only wear masks, but the group has employed multiple artists for its unholy album designs and merchandise. Still, there's a real consistency to it all, which keeps drawing you back into the Ghost universe. You can tell that the band is very particular with the aesthetic it's cultivating and, as horror fans themselves, they often reference the genre.

For example, the cover for debut album *Opus Eponymous* (2010), designed by Swedish design studio Trident Arts, is a direct nod to the poster for Tobe Hooper's *Salem's Lot*. When I first saw it, I remember thinking that if the music is half as cool as the illustrations, I could really get into this. Papa America,

the band's skull-faced, Pope-like frontman becomes further entrenched as metal's *Nostalgia* on the cover for the *If You Have Ghost* EP (2013), in an illustration by Mattias Prek that apes iconic imagery from the 1922 *Nostalgia*. Mattias also created art for the band's "Black to the Future" tour in 2015 with a simple but brilliant design evoking church windows that appear to morph into members of the band.

Ghost's anti-religious imagery has attracted controversy, not surprisingly, its second album, *Infestissimum*, features a treasure of beautiful clichés by Polish artist Zbigniew Bielak and was delayed when several US manufacturers refused to print the CD art that featured an upside-down cross and an orgy. The band also commissioned Bielak for its latest record *Meliora* (2015) and the results are equally as stunning.

Simply put, the group's artwork speaks to me as a guy who began his career (before *Ros Mogue*) designing packaging and working on branding. Not in a subtle, tasteless-a-god kind of way but in a brooser they're-doin'-it-right kind of way. The imagery is as powerful as the music and that's important. In a time where album covers and gig posters are mostly experienced as postage stamp-sized JPGs on iTunes, it's really inspiring when musicians still employ artists and designers to help build a mythology.

Now, if only someone would design a retro-style Zentao Queen black light poster so I can sing behind it. "Black light guides you. Ghost it!"

Now, if only someone would design a retro-style Zentao Queen black light poster so I can sing behind it. "Black light guides you. Ghost it!"



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THE GORE MET

MENU: FEASTING ON FULCI

Like some of the Italian Godfathers of Sex (not to be confused with Herschell Gordon Lewis, the Godfather of Gore), made some 56 films in a career that spanned a little more than three decades, while Fulci enjoyed a good deal of success in Italy in the early '70s, particularly with his top-drawer giallo *Dead as a Woman's Shoe* (1971) and controversial masterpiece *Don't Torture a Duckling* (1972), it was his first bona fide horror film, *Zombie* (1979) that brought him to international prominence.

Also, Fulci's police period lasted but three short years in that time, he produced seven films generally regarded as his best work; they include *City of the Living Dead* (1980), *House by the Cemetery* (1981) and *The Beyond* (1981). The filmmaker staid stumbled with the zany and confused *Minivera Bely* (1982) and never recovered. Seated by major health issues and mostly abandoned by his principal collaborators — writer Dardano Sacchetti, cinematographer Sergio Solvè and composer Fabio Frizzi — Fulci spent the rest of his days chasing ever-smaller budgets and distribution in an industry destroyed by television.

The films he made after *The New York Ripper* (1982) are mainly the province of his most ardent fans, but there are some outstanding highlights: *Ausgeweiht* (1987) and *Demone* (1990) have their Grand Guignol moments, and Fulci's final film, *Door Into Silence* (1991), is an eerie and effective ghost story, but the most enthralling of his late-period works are the black comedy *Touch of Death* (1988) and his greatest flick, the self-reflexive *A Cat in the Brain* (1986).

Touch of Death stars Brett Hasty as Lester Parsons, a lathery who kills wealthy and, uh, aesthetically challenged women of their money before killing and cannibalizing them. Someone



is granting evidence at the scene of Lester's crimes that intimidate him and Lester attempts to uncover this antagonist before he's apprehended. The best ending, which I won't spoil, is audacious!

Footage from *Touch of Death* figures prominently in *A Cat in the Brain*, a fictional film in which Fulci stars as himself. Here, he's trying to finish two real films — *Touch of Death* and *Sedona's Blood* (1988) — but the pressure is causing violent hallucinations and fits of rage. Fulci figures that years of making ultra-gory schlock has taken a psychological toll and seeks psychiatric help. The psychiatrist, Dr.

Egon Schwarz, is a serial killer who sees Fulci as the perfect fall guy for his crimes. He plants a post-hypnotic suggestion in his patient's mind that upon hearing a special tone, he will believe he is responsible for Schwarz' murders and is a "mad, bloodthirsty monster." Fulci begins to lose his grip as sanity as the doctor embarks on a killing spree.

If only this film were that coherent, but it's not. It's cobbled together from a number of movies that Fulci made or had tenuous connections to. Along with the aforementioned titles there are

scenes from *Massacre* (1969), *Bloody Psycho* (1985) and *Hänsel e Gretel* (1990). The filmmaker is inserted into scenes, mostly "directing" them, while others serve as Fulci's hallucinations or Schwarz' murders. There's an endless cavalcade of bad sex, chaise-longue dismemberment, decapitations, melting faces, burning corpses, demons and wheelchair-bound zombies. The quality of the effects is often dubious but there's more fun than enough to make a gorehound goggle. Plus, the Godfather is front-and-center and a ton of fun to watch.

Grandhouse Releasing put out a two-disc *Cat in the Brain* set on DVD in 2006 that was a huge upgrade to its 1999 laser disc. And the new Blu-ray set is a ridiculously extras-laden upgrade to the DVD! The packaging reveals its gorgeous *Proser* set (see *MMVMA*) and contains two Blu-rays, a soundtrack CD, an eighteen-page booklet and a postcard with the cover painting of *Fulci*.

The first disc contains a high-def restoration of the film with English and Italian subtitles and trailers. The second disc contains the Fulci and Hasty interviews and Fulci's 1996 *Reportage* convention appearances from the DVD set, plus new interviews with Frizzi, screenwriter Attilio Tassinari, cinematographer Sandro Rossi and poster artist Enzo Sposito. Also included are Fulci and Hasty's best bits with filmographies and embedded trailers, featurettes trailers for other Grandhouse Releasing titles and some Easter eggs. Essential high-def Fulci right here!





SALES *from the* CRYPT



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LIGHTS OUT

Benjamin Wallfisch
WickedTree Music

Benjamin Wallfisch applies his considerable skills with an orchestra to create a score that matches the clouds of dark malice in the ghost tale *Lights Out*. Direct combat ("Stay Aways," "Saphie's Mind") is paired with familiar shock states and digital distortion, but most of the cues reflect the tenebrous nature of the spirit, with low strings and horns being perpetually sinister, and dribbling down walls or crawling across the floor with faint, screeching strings reaching out like tentacles. Brief swells of warm harmonies evoke the compositions of Bernard Herrmann, but *Lights Out* ultimately propels towards more somber, ghostly encounters, which Wallfisch captures with atmospheric sonic clouds. With the exception of the up-tempo, synth-heavy end credits, it's a work free from rhythms and pulses, that's shaped like passing storm clouds in varying states of formation and impending danger. **B.B.B. - MRH**

orchestral and electronic sounds seamlessly layered into a compact yet sophisticated M3a shocker. Tones and harmonies degrade into blurry sonics, strings grind and stab in off-beats, and as the sinister "Kashwah," the brass wags sounds in a jarring, downward spiral, triggering a blurred amalgam of piano hits, shrieks, bows and various eddying figures. Amid the cyclical motifs and aural effects that create a destabilized state of time and space, Zanov's score is grounded by lead recurring piano tones — a figurative human voice that steers the listener through a closing tunnel of filtering brass and percussive hits ("The Hive") before winding down to a state of calm. **B.B.B. - MRH**



VIDEOGRAM

Glasnostart Gelf Apocifone
Glasnost

Swedish artist Magnus Selin's band Videogram has been on a fun journey, creating imagined apocalypses based around iconic films (Charles Bronson flicks, Friday the 13th, etc.) This time it's an EP exploring post-apocalyptic mayhem in *A Mad Max* and its wasteland-based iterations. Not surprisingly the music takes its cue from the work of Claudio Simonetti, Goblin and the great synth-based suspects. It works best as a dance album, with disco beats and funky synth features — to the point where it almost sounds like Selin's had *Dead or Alive's* "You Spin Me Round" stuck in his head while watching *Death Race 2000*. Though it won't compare up the same imagery as Sean May's violent *Exploitation* score (*Blood Warrior*, *Turkey Shoot*), Selin's got an ear for a good groove and maximizes it here. Clocking in just shy of 30 minutes, *Videogram* never exhausts itself, and enjoys keeping its proverbial pedal pressed to the metal. **B.B.B. - JS**



PAN/SCAN

Genesio Lima
Chryslor

The debut album from Pan/Scan is yet another ode to synth-driven horror scores of the '80s (Carpenter, Goblin, et al). The list goes on as varied as the tracks: "Mileage Treasure" offers up fuzzed-out guitar and wub-wub samples that could have grooved their way out of an acid jazz session or late '70s Italian horror flick, and "Final Lap" features a catchy ostinato that's pumped in from the end credits of *Blade Runner*. Meanwhile, the hilariously titled "Ghoul Pool" plays with poppish keyboard and string sounds, evoking Goblin's *Dance of the Dead* score. What's missing from these early grooves is a little more punch and dread, which made the harder sounds that influenced them resonate so strongly. But the album has a soft charm that aims to please, and the meshwork of styles ultimately works in its favor. **B.B.B. - JS**



TRAITS

Rites & Rituals
Pleasant Records

There is a streak of madness and mystery running through *Traits & Attributes*, the debut EP from Rites & Rituals' duo Traits. The album pairs dark lyrics chock full of images of occult ritual ("Foothills"), perambulation ("Watch Tails") and cultural genocide ("Lps") with other less-than-cheery topics, and music that pegs members Sean-Patrick Nolan (keys, programming) and Shawn Tucker (vocals, guitar, bass) as worshippers of classic goth and post-punk. Bases beam, guitars soar and drums (and drum machines) beat out rhythmic attacks that evoke the likes of The Cure, Sisters of Mercy, Jay G and the Fields of the Nephilim. Tucker's smoky voice, meanwhile, variously calls to mind Robert Smith (The Cure), Ian Astbury (Southern Death Cult) and Brett Anderson (Suede). Well-mixed companion piece. Traits manages



CELL

Marcelo Zarvos
Furnace

It takes a few listens to fully appreciate Marcelo Zarvos' masterful, eerie little soundtrack for Stephen King's tale of a deadly cellular signal that turns normal people homicidal. Although based around a four-note, cyclical pulse, the score features a stirring array of modern

UMBERTO

Attention
Not Not Fun Records

Umberto's latest album represents a Zin-like approach to evoking the filmic imagery of alien invasion/absorption/dismantling conquest battles, emphasizing the pulses, textures and synth chords of classic '80s soundtracks, but opting for a freestyle structure in which the pieces merge rather than smoothly through specific moods. Needled between percussive, dancing tracks such as "Unlabeled" and the heavily sequenced action piece "Queen of Mirrors" are mellow interludes with soft, spacy keyboard tones and synth themes ("Dimension"), and slow builds to elliptical vocals and busy backbeats ("White Night"). In place of stark, spotlighted solos, instruments amperature, drift and splinter into ambient clouds, and then recover for further. Like a classic Tangerine Dream album, there's a winding down with the vocal track "Passage" that forces listeners to pause, reflect and drift into a state of other calm, and gives this meticulously orchestrated album its formal and elegant finale. **B.B.B. - MRH**

LISTEN 67 MY NIGHTMARE

Jed Greed is known in the metal world as the driving force behind iconic punk/thrash outfit Toxic Holocaust, but his creative muscle has led him to release a number of similarly grimy efforts over the years, including his solo album *The Helweggen Sessions*, and side projects Tiger Junkies and War Papper. Lately, however, he's been exploring more unique dark avenues and sounds through outfits such as the ambient X-77, a split EP with east-rock pioneer Dave Allen, and an '80s horror movie soundtrack 7-inch called *Fatal Planet* (with a full-length album to follow). In anticipation of this new five-track record project, here's a rundown of key Greed projects of interest to genre fans, complete with commentary from the man himself.

TOXIC HOLOCAUST

Toxic Holocaust is a hardcore punk and metal mashup that sounds something like early Venom smashing into a concrete wall with Agnostic Front on the other side. With five studio albums under its belt and a library of EPs, demos and splits, it's the muscular, depraved soundtrack to a post-apocalyptic survival story.

The lyrics in Toxic Holocaust revolve around topics like war and government experiments, but there is also good influence taken from books about the occult, like *Raising Hell*, *Journeys to the Other Side* and *The Book from the '70s* called *Witches*.

X-77

In his first big departure from metal, Greed released the album *Psychos* last year under the name X-77. A word ambient drone project recorded on a four-track cassette deck and loaded with disturbing sound effects, it's the musical equivalent of an acid trip gone very wrong.

X-77 was a sound collage of synth drones and/or with samples from various weird records from my collection. Lots of old LSD documentary stuff, black masses and hypnosis.

DAVE ALLEN SPLIT

In another dramatic shift, Greed released a split EP through Relapse Records this year with the King of fuzzy soul guitar, Dave Allen, who made his mark in cult cinema in the '60s by providing soundtracks for exploitation-biker movies including Roger Corman's classic *The Wild Angels*. *My side is basically my tribute to the old '60s biker movie soundtracks and the split is with the guy who was responsible for all of these*

FATAL PLANET

In his first excursion into full-on horror, Greed presented the *Fatal Planet* 7-inch on Poisoned Mind Records this past August, capitalizing on the wave of horror synth projects coming in the wake of John Carpenter's new music career. This 7-inch along with the LP coming out later in the year are totally influenced by horror soundtracks of the late '70s and the '80s. The soundtrack is drawing influences from John Carpenter, Fabio Frizzi, Tangerine Dream and composer / former Tangerine Dream member Klaus Schulze, but all interpreted in my own way, using a variety of old school synths. The gear used gives it a vintage character but I purposely avoided sounding retro or dated.

JACOB WILKINSON

to create a distinct and readers sound despite seeing its influences on its black steers. *Rites & Rituals* distinguishes them as a name to watch for fans of evocative music. **3.5.5.5.5** SP



EERIE

Genre

The Phe Records

Capitalizing on "the Tribulation effect" — a new trend of bands with elements of black metal cloaked in swaths of '70s prog and swaggering rock style — is the recently formed Eerie, an outfit that only hints at the sounds of its members' primary gigs in With, Fetus Skullz and Alenc. Complemented by fantastic cover art from painter Tim Lutz, this debut EP isn't afraid to stretch out the jams. The shortest song comes in at over five minutes, and on these lengthy tracks Eerie deftly combines the aforementioned metal bits with beamed-up goth riffs and Stone Island's inimitable death rock vocal delivery. Lutz's guitar solos can hold their own with any modern shredder, and producer Greg Wilkinson (Jinnee at Sea) perfectly captures the smoky vibes and creepy atmosphere the band is obviously after. Distastefulness is rarely missing from today's metal landscape, so here's hoping Eerie doesn't fade into the black. **3.5.5.5.5** CR



FISTULA

Longing for Infection

Genre

Austin, Ohio's crew of deranged degenerates simultaneously celebrates and laments the horrors of reality as *Longing for Infection*, the band's latest full-length platter of sleazy, sludgy hardcore nastiness. With a sound reminiscent of a Midwestern Epitaphoid exorcising demons

through a thick veil of distortion and dementia, right out of the gate "Too Many Devils and Drugs" tips its hat to Jim Van Bebber's 1994 short *My Sweet Satan*, itself a fictionalization of Gary Lowman's 1984 murder at the hands of Ricky Kasso. "Morgue Abandon" tells the timeless tale of a mortuary worker who loves his job a bit too much. Another highlight (highlight) is "The Big Furthest," which details the nightmare scenario of newly imprisoned females manipulated for sex through fear and intimidation. It's party music for morbid, drug-addled misanthropes and it sounds like how I imagine Bowser's Basement looks, but with more dirty needles and snarl-porn. Shower after listening. **3.5.5.5.5** JDS



GRAVE DESECCRATOR

Dust to Dust

Genre or Not

Brazil's metal pedigree is pretty unimpeachable, but listeners anticipating the likes of Krisiun or Sarcófago may be surprised when the more Scandinavian sounds of Grave Deseccrator prove their ears as a spider does cemetery soil. Not that it's all December worship either, a song such as "Anthraxene Bloodstain" could easily be titled "Anthraxene Bloodstain," given how it echoes the former's sorrowful down before transitioning to the letter's cold death metal. Early '90s Black Sabbath and early '90s black metal atmospheres collide during the lead break of "A Wishing Where." Throughout, *Dust to Dust* contains most of what makes death worth living, namely scatted vocals and strangled strings. The drums feature a problematically robotic groove, recorded with a sound sure to leave many feeling St. Angered, but that's a bone of contention grained away before the finale. **3.5.5.5.5** GT



MYRKUR FRONTWOMAN AMALE BRUUN EMBRACES THE COLD AND THE DARK TO ACOUSTICALLY RE-RECORD HER BLACK METAL ALBUM *AC*... IN A MAUSOLEUM.

CHORDS FROM THE CRYPT

BY KAREN HUNTER

DANISH MUSICIAN AMALE BRUUN TURNED A LOT OF HEADS WHEN HER BLACK METAL BAND MYRKUR RELEASED ITS DEBUT EP IN 2004.

Followed by the full-length *AF* on Indigo Records, Not only was this a female-led project in a still male-dominated music scene, but she was coming from an iconic dad background as a member of New York's Dixie Cups. From the beginning, Myrkur showed a unique allegiance to black metal's inherent darkness, recording *AF* in Norwegian artist Einar Selvik's mausoleum, Tanha Emmareide, and incorporating haunting choir vocals to smooth out the music's brutality. Now Myrkur presents *Mausoleum*, a live, acoustic reinterpretation of *AC*, recorded entirely in the dark confines of the band and accompanied by the Norwegian Girls Choir.

"Stone Head already recorded in the mausoleum, I know it was the perfect place for my music," says Bruun. "It was very dark and cold. The artist who created it wanted to be buried in there. He painted these pale, naked bodies on the walls, and you could sense the feeling of death and life very strongly in there. There is minute sounds of natural events in [the tomb] so you feel an eternal, almost divinity when you sing in there."

While an acoustic black metal album may sound like an oxymoron, Bruun insists there is nothing in her music of odds with the more typical obnoxious speed and harshness of bands such as Mayhem and Gorgoroth.

"When I write *AC*, I write it on many instruments, for example vocals," she explains. "I would write a line for a choir, then picture it played by a distortion guitar instead. So I have always mixed in classical music with metal. I don't think I have to alternate from black metal, I find that many in the scene are big fans of classical music, Nordic folk music and choir."

Even the Norwegian Girls Choir was comfortable with the dark, often satanic music genre with which Myrkur is associated, and they worked with Bruun on her first concert in 2010.

"They seem to enjoy being a part of it, and they get to say some dark words/lyrics when they sing with me," she offers.

It's also impossible to ignore Bruun's unique look as a black metal artist. Her blonde hair and LA model-like appearance is almost comical in contrast to the blood and corpse paint of other artists. It's an accident either, as Myrkur sets out to combine the feminine with the masculine throughout the band's music and themes. Bruun holds the most content of Myrkur's Danish lyrics close to her chest, but does reveal the overarching concept behind *AC* and *Mausoleum*.

"*AC* is the rune Mimir and it stands for the enlightened human being, and for Midgard, and for mankind in general," she offers. "The word 'fear' in Sanskrit does not mean weakness, the word does not have gender; it refers to thinking and, etc. The letter M is a mysterious and powerful letter; it is the 13th letter in the alphabet and it has a strong symbolism, with curves and symmetry. It also stands for Mother, the ultimate life-giving force, the one who holds the divine part inside her. The human Self that is whole, has both the masculine and the feminine power. Strength, honor, intuition, love. Encounter your shadow side and find light."

Unfortunately for Bruun, successfully operating in a very non-feminine genre has led to a series of misogynistic messages from the metal elite.

Still, she does not view herself as a foe left for her struggles. "I don't know what feminism means," she confesses, "there is no final book on what this 'ism' must be, so I can't say I belong to it. But the combination of the masculine and the feminine in all human beings is something that fascinates me."

Despite any abuse she's suffered, Bruun has found the black metal scene to be a safer haven than the time she spent performing upbeat pop melodies in Dixie Cups. In contrasting those two worlds, she offers a somewhat disturbing answer.

"In black metal, darkness is out in the open. In pop it is hidden. It pretends to be the light but it is not. It sometimes laughs at people in black metal thinking they're so dark and dangerous for listening to metal and 'being into that scene.' You want real darkness? Go into the pop music industry. I've seen things I wish I could forget."



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ZOMBIE NIGHT TERROR

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Those who cut their gaming teeth back in the early '90s will find themselves in familiar territory with *Zombie Night Terror*, a puzzle-platformer that sees players guiding a mindless horde of zombies

through a variety of environments and obstacles. French indie developer NoClip trades on the nostalgia factor in more ways than one, however, and *Zombie Night Terror* combines retro, pixelated graphics with smooth, dynamic movement and sophisticated visual effects. In addition, the game showcases some serious genre love, with nods to zombie cinema and '80s horror references aplenty.

The main menu greets players with a dedicated theater front where they can select their fictional horror movie-themed level. A brief cinematic intro sets the stage (the characters bubble in hilarious gibberish while English text bubbles guide you along) before the deadies come a-splashing. Your objective is to use the available zombie "mutations" or members of your horde so they can traverse their surroundings, bash down doors and feed on the backs of their helpless prey. Mutations are unlocked one at a time (although they can be combined in later levels) and instruc-



tions on their use are cleverly disguised as emergency TV broadcasts aimed to warn the population of the upcoming threat.

Granted, the *Limbo*-style gameplay is not a unique concept (but for Gen-Xers who grew up gaming, it's a welcome return to the days of tough puzzles and simple controls. NoClip is comprised of equal parts programming and artists (two of each) and the split focus is evident in *ZNT*'s slick-yet-

vintage interface. The puzzles get tough quick (old-timers will be reminded of how fast-scrunching frustration it is to spend ten minutes puzzling your heads, only to see it suddenly obliterated by an unseen bossy bloop) but the game keeps you motivated with hilarious tongue-in-cheek humor and those retro horror references. Each of *ZNT*'s 40 levels include a bonus challenge to up the re-play factor, so if you like puzzle platformers and you like 'em stylish (and today, there's plenty to esteem you here).

ANDREA SCHIACCI



WARNING: CHALLENGING CHARACTER CREATION, BRIEF ANTIHUMAN LOCALS
WARNING: LEARNING CURVE INTENSE FOR NEW PLAYERS, OCCASIONAL CHAOS



MORRHEIM: CITY OF THE DEAD - WITCH HUNTERS DLC

Windows
100%

Focus Home Interactive

These days it feels like everything snazzy has a digital counterpart. Take, for example, the 1990 tabletop strategy game *Morrheim* by Games Workshop (creators of *Warhammer*, of which *Morrheim* is a spinoff). Last November it got a digital update in the form of *Morrheim: City of the Dead*, a challenging turn-based video game that allows players to control, hone and upgrade a squadron (i.e., warband), which they then pit against various battle scenarios and online adversaries. This summer, *City of the Dead* got an update of its own with the *Witch Hunters DLC*, which adds a new faction (Witch Hunters), a new themed campaign and seven units (among them the Witch Hunter Captain, Regiments, Templar Knights and the mighty Executioner).

The city at *Morrheim*, where the action takes place, will feel familiar even if you are unfamiliar with the *Warhammer*/*Morrheim* property. The streets and buildings are deliciously decrepit (just how you like them!) and often filled with traps and the remains of



unsentimental intricacies. The urban setting provides multiple hiding places to ambush the enemy force and plenty of perches to set up your snipers, which is important because real injury (including the loss of limbs) and death among your warband is not uncommon. The enemies themselves are varied, from the truly beastial (monstrous rat folk) to more traditional troops. Regardless of combatant, strategy is key. Make that your motto.

A final note: If you are calling *City of the Dead* the first time, prepare to spend more than an hour on the fairly gameplay tutorial, as you'll need them.

Ultimately, while affordably priced at \$10.99, how much value you'll get out of this DLC depends on whether or not you've exhausted the four factions that came with the core release. But if you're battle weary and ready for a fresh challenge, the skills, perks and spells perched by the *Witch Hunters* faction will certainly bolster the morale of your troops. Ready, set... attack!

MICHAEL S. KUTNER



WARNING: CHALLENGING CHARACTER CREATION, BRIEF ANTIHUMAN LOCALS
WARNING: LEARNING CURVE INTENSE FOR NEW PLAYERS, OCCASIONAL CHAOS

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CLASSIC CUT

FORBIDDEN PLANET'S ID MONSTER

USA—1956

It's a tantalizingly iconic scene from the annals of sci-fi: the menacing image of Professor Morbius' Id Monster, highlighted in bursts of luminous red as it breaches a force field, roaring at helpless soldiers before smashing them to pieces. Now 60 years old, this indelible clip is all we are allowed to see of the Id Monster in *Forbidden Planet*, but its legacy has paved the way for a host of nightmare creatures from the depths of our subconscious.

Channeling Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, the film sees Commander Adams (Leslie Nielsen) and his crew sent to the far reaches of space to check on a lost expedition. Upon arrival they find that the only survivors are Professor Morbius (Walter Pidgeon) and his fetching daughter Altma (Anne Francis), both living in a seemingly peaceful paradise. But buried under their ship is the expansive city of the extinct Krell race. Morbius has learned of their powers to turn thoughts into matter and harnessed them, but with one big flaw: the Krell's unconscious and destructive id, which was their undoing.

By the mid-1950s, psychology and psychoanalysis were permeating the arts, such as in Hitchcock's *Spielbound* (1948), with its trippy, Salvador Dalí-realized dream sequences. But until *Forbidden Planet* few American films until *Forbidden Planet* had looked their Freudian underpinnings with such specific language. "Monsters from the Id" proclaims Professor Morbius (Walter Pidgeon), in a catchphrase that has worked its way into our vernacular.

It's intriguing how far down the rabbit hole the filmmakers were willing to go with the manifestation of the Id Monster, inspired by the Cuban character in *The Tempest* fusing him as a darker emanation of the Prospero character. Research indicates that the Id Monster was, at least at the conceptual level, meant

to look even more like professor Morbius than we see on screen. Early production sketches reveal a version of the monster as a giant, bipedal version of Morbius' head.

Although we're instead treated to an amorphous monster (eventually realized through animation, courtesy of Disney's Joshua Meador), the psychological implications of the Id Monster remain truly disturbing. By the time we catch up with the story, it has already been members of Morbius' crew limb-from-limb, leaving

only father and daughter co-existing in uneasy solitude. Now Morbius fears that Adams and his crew will move in on Altma and take her away from him, the Id Monster reacts against the crew with increasingly violent actions. There's a rare undercurrent of incest, shocking to find in a movie of the era.

Clearly, the creature must have resonated with filmmakers such as David Cronenberg, whose fascination with the "mind/body schism" permeates all the way back to his early films. Just as Morbius uses the Krell technology to fashion a corporeal beast that kills, so too does Mole Carver (Samantha Eggen) in *The Blood* (1979). Locked in a bitter custody battle, she manifests murderous offspring through her rage and willpower alone.

Visually, Meador's animated monster looks ahead to other creatures, ranging from the first "Beast in the Black" from TV's *The Great American Way* (1961), to the rendering of one of the "Old Ones" in *The Danish Horror* (1970). When Philip Hinchcliffe took over the reign as *Doctor Who*'s producer in the mid '70s and started pilfering storylines from horror classics, his production team coopted the Id Monster in the Planet of *Evil* storyline almost verbatim, rendering it in similar luminous outlines achieved through early FX techniques.

Also essential to the monster is the groundbreaking, jarring score by electronic music pioneers Louis and Babe Barron, who didn't even get a proper credit (instead, they were cited for "electronic knifed"). In *The Sound of Tomorrow: How Electronic Music Was Scuttled into the Mainstream* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2012), Mark Breth writes that "the agonized electronic cries the Barrons give [the Id Monster] bridge the gap between personal and impersonal, the human and the monstrous."

In its fusion of psychology and technology (both within the film's diegesis, and in the experimental creation of the visual and acoustical effects by the filmmakers), the Id Monster throws down the gauntlet for future horrors. (John Carpenter has claimed to be particularly influenced by the movie.) Whether invisible or rendered as a wild beast, the Id Monster turned the tables on audiences, implying that we have the same primal ferocity as the creatures that have been terrifying us for years.

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technology (both within the film's diegesis, and in the experimental creation of the visual and acoustical effects by the filmmakers), the Id Monster throws down the gauntlet for future horrors. (John Carpenter has claimed to be particularly influenced by the movie.) Whether invisible or rendered as a wild beast, the Id Monster turned the tables on audiences, implying that we have the same primal ferocity as the creatures that have been terrifying us for years.

JEFF STENGELAS



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The background of the poster is a solid, vibrant red. Overlaid on this are the dark, intricate silhouettes of bare tree branches, creating a dense and somewhat chaotic web of lines. The branches vary in thickness and direction, some reaching towards the top corners, others crossing horizontally. The overall effect is one of a dark, claustrophobic forest.

BLAIR WITCH

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